

WOMEN'S ORAL NARRATIVES IN TUNIS

BY

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To the memory of my father

ABSTRACT

This study is based on oral narratives collected during six months fieldwork from December 1989 to May 1990 in Tunis.

The work examines the role and importance of story-telling in the lives of my three Beldi informants - all women from the city of Tunis - and explores the themes contained in their tales in the light of their personal histories and their own interpretations.

Through the act of narration women produce a vision of themselves and of their moral and physical world.

In the narratives discussed here, contradictory and competing pictures are painted. One narrator presents a conservative moralistic view of the role of women. The two others produce through their narratives a rebellious, racy and subversive view of women. These contradictory visions of women are produced by women for women.

The introduction first reviews research into Tunisian story-telling, then relevant methodology and theory in general, and finally outlines the approach adopted in this thesis. Background information is also provided on story-telling in Tunis, the conduct of fieldwork and the three narrators used in this study.

Chapters two and three concentrate on the narrators and their backgrounds. Chapter Two presents the social background of Beldi - people of the city of Tunis - who form the subject matter of the tales. Chapter Three concentrates on the relationship between the women and their tales.

Chapter four, five and six identify and group the recurring themes contained in the tales. The thematic categories relate to power, honour and shame, fate and other topics of concern to women in their daily lives.

Chapter seven, finally, concentrates on the use of formulae, asides and diminutives as salient features which give the tales their particular character.

Appendix I contains the full list of stories and the English translations of the stories discussed in the body of the thesis. Appendix II contains the Arabic texts of selected stories.

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APPENDIX I The full list of the stories by narrator and serial number, and the full texts in English of stories discussed in the body of the thesis.

APPENDIX II Arabic texts of selected stories.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The system adopted in this thesis for transliterating the Tunisian urban dialect follows the guidelines established by the Library of Congress-Processing Department.

The list of characters used for transliterating the Tunisian urban dialect is as follows:

'	kh	sh	gh	n
b	d	ṣ	f	h
t	dh	ḍ	q	w
th	r	ṭ	k	y
j	z	ẓ	l	ah
ḥ	s	'	m	

Long: ā
 ū
 ī

Short: a
 u
 i

Diphthongs: aw
 ay

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. General

This thesis is closely bound up with my own childhood in Tunis. Brought up in a milieu in which story-telling was still a lively, though, alas, declining tradition, as an adult I have been drawn to try to understand the expressive power and deeper meanings of such tales, and record a small number of them before they vanish with their tellers. My interest began during my work as a teacher of English at the 'Institut Supérieur de l'Animation Culturelle', where I was in contact with teachers of anthropology and folklore and introduced to a rich tradition of Tunisian folklore through the pages of the Institute's paper *al-Turāth*.

Although tale-telling as a form of entertainment has to a large extent been supplanted by written literature, and sidelined by the increase of literacy and the growth of the media, it can still be encountered even in major urban centres such as Tunis.

In Tunisia as elsewhere in the Middle East, there is a general division in terms of performance between the cultural worlds of men and women.

The cultural heritage of the world of women has been neglected by anthropologists and literary specialists alike, and yet as story-tellers they have been part of the oral tradition and their literature is of a richness which bears detailed study.

When I began the fieldwork in Tunis between December 1989 and May 1990 I realised just how urgent the matter of recording this tradition had become. I had hoped to witness tale-telling in its natural environment -

the extended family circles and special female gatherings, in which the audience fully participates. In fact such sessions are now (in the 1990's) becoming rare. I recorded tales told especially for my benefit, by women who seldom nowadays practise the art which was thriving only some twenty years ago. In the course of over fifty recording sessions, spread over approximately six months, I built up a good relationship with three women, whose style increased in naturalness and spontaneity as we progressed.

The circumstances under which I worked limited the scope of the research to some extent, as it was not possible to observe the context of the performances and record the reactions of the audience which form a natural part of the story-telling process.

However, my primary intention here is not to deal with the relationship between the tales, the audience and the society, but rather with teller, tale and society. The focus is therefore upon the role and importance of tale-telling in the lives of my three Beldi informants - all women from the city of Tunis - and to explore the themes contained in their tales in the light of their personal histories and their own interpretations.

1.2. Story-telling in Tunis

In Tunis the tale-performer is a woman and the best artists are generally held to be old women. The male world is not of these kinds of imaginative tales, but is one in which historical legends are related by professional tellers. Female story-telling always takes place in private and behind closed doors. Almost invariably one of the elders, preferably a grandmother or a greataunt, would take the lead. Many men insisted that the performance of tales is not their forte and that in any case 'they have left such childish nonsense to women' (Ghāya's husband, discussion,

15/1/1990). It is significantly a woman's art form, which was developed and maintained until very recently by women. Bouhdiba (1977), notes that 'women, in particular, keep folktale traditions alive' (Bouhdiba 1977: 19), and this is attested by various scholars I talked to during my fieldwork.

By reason of their position in traditional Tunisian society, women remain in the family circle and rarely become professional. In wedding festivities, some Beldi families hire a *ḥannāna* who would take charge of the bride's hair care and skincare and would entertain the female guests with songs of praise and tales. But this tradition is in decline. All narrators testify that, nowadays, they perform much less frequently than they did a few years ago. The majority of women in pre-modern Tunisia were illiterate and tale-telling was one of their modes of self-expression. Nowadays women have begun to benefit from the spread of female education and the 1970's and 1980's saw the rise of other forms of female expression, i.e. the publication of women's magazines, short stories and poetry (Fontaine 1990).

Male story-telling, by contrast was a professional art up until the late 1960's and generally occurred in public places such as coffeehouses or *makhāzin*, 'stable yards converted into public places'. The coffeehouse was one of the social institutions that flourished in Tunisia after the Ottomans established their rule (al-Kaak 1963).

In Tunisia, up until after independence in 1956, the *fdāwi/rāwi*, 'traditional story-teller', was a prominent figure in Tunisian folk life. He plied his trade in various ways, he sometimes sat in market places and neighbourhood squares or performed in cafés for a strictly male audience. Unlike his equivalent in Egypt, the Tunisian *rāwi* used no

musical accompaniment. Historians document the existence of a rich male narrative tradition throughout the nineteenth century and everywhere in protectorate Tunisia (Interview Guiga, 2/4/1990).

Aziza (1975), writing about traditional art forms in Tunisia, gives public story-telling with a professional teller pride of place.

Describing life in Tunis at the beginning of the century, Turki, in *Tunis Naguère et Aujourd'hui*, tells of the story-teller who would sit on a high stool and punctuate his narrative with a stick.

A peine s'était il installé sur sa haute chaise, tenant en main le baton dont il scande son récit, que chacun s'approchait, ouvrait l'oeil et s'installait, l'oreille au guet et l'esprit aiguisé (Turki 1978: 25).

The reciters, along with *Alf Layla we Layla*, performed legends of the ancient Arabs: *Sīrat 'Antar ibn Shaddād*, *Sīrat Beni Hilāl*.

Sīrat 'Antar relates the story of the pre-Islamic poet 'Antar ibn Shaddād and his love for 'Abla. *Sīrat Bani Hilāl*, 'the Hilālī Epic', glorifies the migratory journey undertaken by that tribe in the tenth and eleventh centuries out of famine stricken Najd through the levant to Egypt, the Sudān and the Maghrib.

In an interview broadcast by the Tunisian Radio Two, Hedi Turki a painter, speaking about his younger days in Tunis in the late fifties, made the following statement:

The *rāwi/fdāwi*, 'professional story teller' was a famous public figure until the late sixties, performing in cafés such *Hammām al-Rmīmi* in the *Medīna*, 'old town', and public houses. Until the late sixties, there were privately owned *makhāzin*, 'stable yards' which were converted in the evenings into public houses bringing together

men of the neighbourhood in the old quarters of the *Medīna*. The men would discuss politics, read poetry and play music - many musical and poetic schools originated and developed in those *makhāzin* - and listen to a professional story-teller. *Rāwis* would tell historic legends like *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, 'the Hilālī epic', or *Sīrat 'Antar*, the Arabian black hero and his love story with 'Abla, and *Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma* " (Hedi Turki Interview by Radio Two, Tunis, 25/3/1990).

With long tales, the reciters could sketch the episodes and ensure a constant audience over a long period of time. Connelly noted that:

The story-teller ensured a constant audience over a long period of time and thus a steady income by presenting a serial-like continuation of particular tales at special times and places each day over several months, or for as long as he could maintain the interest of a steady and sizeable crowd and continue to embellish the various episodes of a given tale. In the case of some narratives, such as '*Antar* or the *Hilāl* tales, a skilled story-teller well versed in his tradition could stretch the episodes out over a year, while maintaining an interested and paying audience (Connelly 1986: 7).

The primary method for the story-teller of obtaining money is to collect it in a tray before going. Turki reports, 'there was no specific fee, but at the end of the performance the story teller would pass round a tray and the members of the audience would pay according to their *himma*, 'rank'/social standing' (Turki, Interview by Radio Two, Tunis, 25/3/1990).

The decline of the tradition was mainly due to government policy. After independence, the government emphasized literate culture at the expense of oral, street culture. Street performances such as the ambulant musicians, *al-karakūz*, 'traditional form of theatre', and story-tellers were officially discouraged as signs of illiteracy that modern Tunisia was trying to eradicate (Guiga interview, Tunis, 2/4/1990).

The past couple of decades, however have witnessed a renewed interest in oral culture and serious scholarship in the discipline of folklore. The 1970's were marked by Pan-Arabism, and oral culture has come to be viewed as the truest expression of Tunisia's authentic national culture. Folklore centres were set up in an effort to collect and systematically study its oral patrimony. And in their quest for national authenticity and their attempt to safeguard local culture, intellectuals are now beginning to discover folk values and have undertaken to encourage the revival of tale-telling as a form of entertainment. The *Rāwi* was back on the scene during the Medīna festival which took place in Ramaḍān this year, 1991 (Ben Milad 1991). Unfortunately it has lost its spontaneous character being organised by government bodies rather than the people themselves. But behind closed doors, women escaped the government's restrictions and have kept the tradition alive.

1.3. Occasions for story-telling

In the following description of the contexts of story-telling, I relied heavily on comments from the tellers themselves and to a lesser extent on my own recollections. As a child and later as an adolescent I watched many sessions of story-telling. Tales have been, in the past, and to a certain extent still are, told mainly during informal gatherings on winter

evenings, involving mainly women and children. A grandfather occasionally would join in the sessions.

The long *Ramaḍān* soirées are especially conducive to tall tales:

We used to sit up late enjoying tales of wonders and adventures. Families would take turns in entertaining guests. We would sit through the night, telling stories and eating special *Ramaḍān* sweet and savoury delicacies, until *al-shūr*, (the last meal before recommencing the fast). Our soirées comprised only women; the men would stay out late in cafés being entertained by a professional story-teller (Ghāya, Interview, 12/2/90).

Families were large; children, parents and grandparents used to live under the same roof. In our house there were about ten women, including seven female cousins. In the afternoon, the men would go back to work, and we would sit around the tea brazier, each to her task; needlework, embroidery, sewing, lacemaking, knitting and telling stories until dinner time. Long winter evenings also offered opportunities for tale-telling. During *Ramaḍān* soirees, twenty to forty women would sometimes gather together. Each evening was spent in a different house. By the end of the month we would have visited all the family, first and second cousins. We passed the nights telling stories until dawn (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/90).

Our family was very large, and we all used to live in the same neighbourhood. Our gatherings were frequent and at the time there was no TV to entertain us during long winter evenings, so we told stories to pass the time. At times my grand-father used to join in

and we were treated to wonderful stories from *al-Hadīth al-Sharīf* (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/90).

There is a common belief that stories can only be told at night. There is a taboo prohibiting tale-telling during the day: a person who tells stories during the day would give birth to bald children. All informants explain that they do not believe in such a story and that only practical considerations rule out this possibility. Women are busy during the day with their household chores, and the night time is certainly more appropriate for flights of imagination. Female gatherings drift easily into tale-telling. Night time is a moment between sleeping and waking, a time conducive to dreaming, to flights of imagination.

Another informal occasion which brings women together is during the 'awla -period 'a month of preparation of yearly provisions of *couscous* and *mhammas*'. It usually happens during August, as *couscous* dries in the sun. The women of the same family and neighbourhood take turns in moving from house to house helping prepare each housewife's provisions of *couscous*. Men are required to keep out of the way. They usually congregate in one of the houses in the neighbourhood and eat a *couscous* lunch prepared from fresh *couscous*.

We used to make *al-'awla* . It used to be a great occasion for merriment; a wedding-like celebration. All the women from the same family and the neighbourhood would come and help. We had great days of singing and joking, with no men around (Ghāya, Interview, 12/2/90).

Engagement and wedding celebrations offer good opportunities for story telling. Wedding celebrations are the province of women and last seven

days and seven nights. Story telling is a favourite activity during the *henna* evenings at the bride's parents' house. Khīra notes: "I remember no week passed without a celebration, an engagement, a circumcision, a wedding, a pilgrim returning from Mecca. Major and minor events were celebrated"(Khīra, Interview, 15/3/1990).

Sa'diyya relates: "Circumcisions, engagements, weddings, religious festivals such as *al-'ashūra* (commemoration of the death of al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandson), and *al-Mawlid* (anniversary of Muḥammad's birth) offered great opportunities for women's gatherings and therefore for story-telling" (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/90).

Telling tales is, therefore, a social activity. The choice of tales had almost as much didactic as entertainment value for the family. For the young they helped their socialization and imbue with the value of the culture. For the adults, the tales told on wedding occasions are very sexual in nature, counselling the bride through a combination of entertaining story with moral and social instruction.

1.4. Previous research

Interest in Tunisian oral literature can be said to have started with the work of the French missionaries, in particular André Louis (1977), who compiled an ethnographic bibliography of Tunisia.

Some isolated attempts to collect tales were made at the beginning of the century and published in two local reviews, *Revue Tunisienne* and the review of the *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* (IBLA). There was no attempt to collect the tales systematically. These reviews contained about thirty tales altogether with no commentary relating the texts to any

background. The resulting texts are often little more than abstracts or summaries which were clearly inadequate for any analysis in depth. The tendency in this kind of publication has been to concentrate on the origin and history of the tales with no background information on the tellers or the contexts of narration. This is mainly a consequence of the geographical-historical method which was developed at the turn of the century and influenced for many years many researchers in the field of folklore.

The early collections (Labonne 1920, Bouquero 1922, Ben Attar 1923, Aslan 1933, Rivals 1947, Mzali 1949) were frequently intended for primary education. Most editors did not even include the names of those who told them the stories, far less give details about their background or the occasions on which the stories were told.

In the later French collections (Guiga, T. 1968, Laroui 1978, Houripasotti 1980), only a few collectors have commented upon the texts themselves, their form or style, or to give the most basic information regarding the narrators and the context of narration.

A man who for many years has been a major force in the coordination of the collection of folk literature throughout Tunisia on behalf of the Ministry of Culture is Moḥammad al-Marzouki. He has edited and published a great quantity of folktales and poetry (al-Marzouki 1967, 1968, 1971, 1976), and incorporated folklore into plays and radio and television. Another contemporary Tunisian who has been active in the Ministry of Culture is Tahar Guiga. He published the texts of some of the Hilālī tales collected by his father in both Arabic and English (Guiga, T. 1968).

In-depth studies of the literary and social significance of tales and tale-telling in Tunisia are generally lacking. There were some efforts made by

some researchers at the Institut National d'Archeologie et d'Arts, but the emphasis in the work published in their quarterly *Cahiers d'Archeologie et d'Arts* has tended to be restricted to the form of the tale as written without commentary on the oral text.

In recent decades, with a growing awareness of the importance of the oral tradition, scholars are now collecting folktales and folk poetry in danger of extinction.

The 'Institut Supérieur d'Animation Culturelle' was established in the early 1970's to collect and establish the study of oral literature over the country as a whole. Some of the most original work has come from the growing number of students at this institute carrying out analyses of oral literature in Arabic for their research degrees. These (Khayreddine 1985, Khmakhim 1986, Gouja 1987, Issawi 1989) have been able to draw attention to many aspects which earlier collectors and students tended to overlook because of their theoretical pre-conceptions or because they were, after all, strangers to the culture.

1.4.1. Women's studies

The available published literature suggests that little attention has been paid to the importance of women's expressive behaviour. During the 1940's and the early 1950's researchers were interested in women's expressive behaviour only as manifested in charms, quaint customs and beliefs and home remedies, but tale-telling has been very much neglected. Little of significance relating to women's folklore was published. This trend continued throughout the 1960's and into the 1970's. André Louis' (1976) investigation of tales and their tellers, while primarily concerned with men and tale-telling as a cultural activity in the face of the mass-media, discussed women storytellers very briefly. Bouhdiba (1977), in

his collection and study of ten children's tales was mainly concerned with the sociological function of tale-telling and referred in passing to the roles of women in this activity. A new collection of tales by Laroui (1989) has been published recently. Laroui, who died a few years ago, was not a traditional story-teller. He adapted women's tales for radio and television production with the artificial constraints of time which the media entail. Moreover, the fact of women's tales being mediated by a male broadcaster detracts from the authenticity of the event and makes them unsuitable as primary data.

Baklouti (1988) has collected and published tales from both men and women; in the introduction he considered briefly the structure and function of the tales and did not relate the tales to their tellers or undertake any work of comparison.

Past folklore studies in Tunisia have been mostly rooted in tale-type analysis or literary structuralism, and were carried out by men who were clearly ignorant of a body of women's folklore that comes into play only when women are together. Past studies of folklore (Guiga, A.1968, Guiga, T. 1968, Baker 1978, Ayoub 1984, Connelly 1989), focused only on male art forms. Yet at least half of the expressive behaviour of a society is overlooked by investigating only the verbal or expressive behaviour of one sex. In Tunisia men's activities usually take place in the public arena, women's in private. As Ardener (1972) noted that surface structure may express the male view of the world, obscuring the existence at a deeper level of an autonomous female view. Tales, within the context of women are part of a social discourse that has hardly been exploited. A female perspective led me to enjoy access to the pleasure of intimacy in the women's world, discover the importance of female art forms such as tale-telling and explore a body of literature and a female view which have

hardly been considered in past studies. Coming from the culture also carries the advantage of being able to understand more readily instances of cultural patterns and experiences. Stephenson and Greer (1981) pointed out that the indigenous field-worker has the advantage of being able to attach appropriate meanings to the patterns that he or she uncovers much faster than the non-indigenous researcher.

1.5. Previous approaches to the tale

Influential studies of the folktale have conceived of the tale as an independent entity and have therefore concerned themselves with the text independently from either narrator or context. The tale as a product has been studied for its structures, both representing commonly occurring components, e.g. in the manner of Propp (1970), and as symbolic representations, in the manner of Lévi-Strauss (1958, 1963). Comparative techniques, e.g. the Historico-geographic method, have also looked at the tale in terms of its distribution, its place of origin, and the history of its dissemination. The oral formulaic school concentrated upon the procedures whereby tales are generated, an approach pioneered by Parry (1971) and Lord (1960). In many cases the anonymous collectivity has been the focus of folkloric attention.

The past couple of decades, however have witnessed a shift in perspective in the dynamics of folklore that have begun to change the emphasis. The recent performance-centred perspective (Dégh 1972, Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975, Pentikainen 1978, Bauman 1986) has focused on a growing awareness of the role of the individual narrator in oral narration, the performance context and the meaning of folklore for its users. Folktale narration as a social phenomenon has been most thoroughly studied by Dégh in her attempt to chart the teaching situation,

the context of presentation, and the character of folktale narrators related in the southern Hungarian village of Kaskad.

The focus on performance as constitutive of verbal art (Bauman 1986) has entailed the restoration of the oral product to the individual who produces it; the constitution of his/her repertoire, his/her acquisition of performance and his/her worldview (Pentikainen 1978, Bauman 1986).

Pentikainen's study focussed on the reception/transmission process and the narrator's creative role in folklore. Bauman's perspective centered around a basic reorientation viewing folklore/verbal art as 'a mode of communication and a way of speaking' (Bauman 1986: 3). His major concern was to emphasize the necessity of viewing verbal art in actual performance, as well as in broad social context.

In Tunisia up until now the poetics of oral narratives have not figured in any of the studies carried out, and the relationship between the tellers and their tales has yet to be explored.

1.6. Choice of Tunis

Tunis was selected for the collection and analysis of the tales for many reasons. I was myself born and brought up in Tunis. For me, the tale is one of my deepest and most enduring childhood impressions - I can still remember snatches of tales I heard as a child, and references to others for adults only that I was not allowed to hear. I wanted to write about Tunis because I was familiar with the local culture; a universe I know and which has profoundly marked my own outlook.

Tunis was also chosen because of my familiarity with the language. We have had tales divorced from their natural environment in many respects including language. An aim of the present study is to add to the work

already undertaken by providing an analysis of the tales linked to their tellers. Further aims are to explore the themes and to discuss certain aspects of the language in which they are expressed.

Finally, rural folklore has often been studied at the expense of urban folklore, and I wished to contribute to the correction of this imbalance.

1.7. Data collection

The data used in this thesis cover the repertoire of three female narrators from Tunis; Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khira. The tales were recorded on cassette in the course of fieldwork carried out in Tunis, between December 1989 and April 1990. I tape recorded the tales at the homes of the tellers. On one occasion Khira was visited unexpectedly by some relatives and she agreed to perform in their presence. The performer and the audience ignored the tape recorder and the spontaneity of the production and the genuine relation between artist and audience were captured on tape. Generally, however, recordings were made by me in an encounter with one of the narrators allowing me to explore the narrator's interpretation of the tale after she told it.

I tried to tap the full depth of the narrators' repertoires and generally succeeded except in the case of Khira who was only able to tell me six stories altogether as she fell ill in the middle of my fieldwork.

The narrators were all asked to tell their personal history, where and from whom they first learned their tales. In transcribing the tales of this collection, no items have been deleted. All the narrators' words have been faithfully transcribed, even in cases where ideas have been started and then dropped, and where a word was repeated. In the appendix the Arabic text of selected tales is a literal transcription of the tapes. The English text is a rendering rather than a word for word translation. Formulae have

been underlined in the English and Arabic text, and the commentaries or asides of the narrators have likewise been italicized in English and enclosed within parenthesis in Arabic.

1.8. Fieldwork

Three aspects of my identity affected to some extent the nature of my social relationship with the Beldi women. First, my parents' origin in Tunis was significant for securing me access to and establishing an affinity with my informants. The women saw me as one of themselves. Sa'diyya has ties of kinship to my family, so I needed no introduction. The others knew my family members by name. On the first occasion I was introduced to Ghāya, I was asked *bint shkūn*, 'whose daughter are you?' Her husband, a retired pensioner from the Ministry of Agriculture, asked me whether I was related to Mr So-and-so, who used to live in *al-Hfir*, a quarter in the *Medīna*, and happens to be my deceased grandfather. This established my credentials and provided me with a significant advantage. It did not take me long to move beyond the facade of formality exhibited to outsiders and enter the intimate world of my informants.

The other factor was my interest in aspects of traditional Beldi culture which proved significant for the structuring of my relationship with the informants. Repeatedly, women expressed their surprise and delight over my interest in traditional aspects of their Beldi culture that people of my age had begun to disregard. They were demonstrably pleased with me for recognizing the worth of traditional culture, and the idea that a researcher should wish to write about *them*, stimulated them to assist me, both in terms of story-telling and cultural background, even to the extent of showing off their 'Beldi-ness' by offering me special Beldi treats! Finally

the female dimension of my identity encouraged the women's willingness to express their thoughts and beliefs relatively freely. My initial conversation with Ghāya was constrained by the presence of her husband who tried to control the process of elicitation. But later I discovered that she visited regularly her son - an unmarried doctor who lived alone - and we agreed to meet there and discuss freely. Subsequent recording sessions and conversations with Ghāya yielded less guarded responses and more intimacy.

1.9. The narrators

To place the tales in their cultural context it was important to obtain information about each story-teller and her background. Most essential data was obtained during the process of getting acquainted with the story-tellers. Information was gathered for each, on her age, origin, occupation, educational level, sources for story material and experience that could affect her telling or her view of the significance of the tales to her life.

In almost every Beldi household, there is among the elders a *Shehrazād*, 'female story-teller' who is able to tell a good many tales from the community repertoire. However, the tales treated here came from outstanding personalities. The choice of my informants was determined by a number of factors; the high regard in which they are held in their families and community, the extent of their repertoire and their individual skills. They all think of themselves as tale-tellers with a special ability. It is important to emphasize that none of them was a teller by profession. They tell their tales much as their grandmothers and great

aunts did; informally in the home for the amusement of members of the immediate family, neighbours and close friends.

1.9.1. Ghāya

Ghāya is a housewife aged sixty. She, her husband and their youngest daughter live in La Marsa, in the northern suburbs.

It is as a knowledgeable tradition-bearer and a talented story-teller that she understands her own identity, and this is how she is identified by her family, relatives and friends. In my search for story-tellers in the city, I was first introduced, through friends, to her cousin, Kalthoum, reputed for her art of tale-telling, but she soon recommended Ghāya, "*Ella* Ghāya, my cousin, is the true artist; she is very knowledgeable and her repertory is much vaster than mine. I am only an apprentice to her." Kalthūm referred to Ghāya as *Ella* Ghāya, 'lady/mistress Ghāya', a title used as a mark of respect and consideration and in testimony to the prestige she enjoyed in her family. During my contacts with her, Ghāya was consulted on various occasions by relatives to advise them on various traditional matters. On the death of one of her relatives, she had to stay at the house of the deceased for seven days as was the tradition. On her return, she explained to me that her presence was central, because she knew all the funerary rules and conventions. On that occasions she said: "Young people don't know how to mourn their dead."

Ghāya has been known for her talent since an early age. Her sisters told me that she used to entertain them a great deal with 'stories she knew by heart'. "She had an amazing memory", one of them reported (Burān, interview, Tunis, 20 /1/1990).

Ghāya is well educated and speaks fluent French. On the first occasions I started to record Ghāya, in her telling she occasionally used classical

Arabic, then she gradually shifted into the urban Tunis dialect. Two factors appear to have influenced her choice of style. Ghāya is educated and lives in a society which is dominated by the written word and its supremacy over the oral. She holds the common view that classical Arabic, the language of the written literature, is the highest form of art. She chose this medium and in many cases she would embellish her narration with poetry and proverbs (tale R1, R8), to lend a more impressive tone to her tale and express her literary ability.

A second factor which appears to have influenced her choice of register is the academic framework within which we worked. I was a research student and that meant that the work might be published. The use of the tape recorder also meant that her words would go beyond the here and now. Ghāya intentionally chose classical Arabic as being appropriate to such circumstances. Later, as the fieldwork progressed and we became more intimately acquainted, she shifted to a systematic use of colloquial Arabic.

1.9.2. Sa'diyya

Sa'diyya is a widow aged fifty five. She lives in a house left by her deceased husband in Rades in the southern suburbs. She enjoys telling tales and prides herself on knowing many; her repertoire is indeed the largest. Many of her relatives testify to the fact that, after the death of their uncle's wife (a very talented story-teller), no one among the elders except Sa'diyya was ever able to tell stories like her. She is in great demand at all family celebrations. In addition to her story-telling talent, Sa'diyya is cheerful and has a great sense of humour. Amongst all informants she was the greatest joker and the least inhibited. She has a fund of racy jokes. She considers her talent as "a gift from God". Her

real name is Sa'diyya but she is known as *Lillāhum*, 'Mistress of all', in testimony to the prestige she enjoys in her family and community.

Sa'diyya can neither read nor write, but her repertoire includes tales from the Thousand and One Nights which she heard from her uncle who was a schoolmaster and had access to material from the Arabic oral tradition available in print.

1.9.3. Khīra

Khīra is sixty two. She never married and lives with her brother, his wife and children in Le Bardo, to the west of Tunis. I was introduced to her through mutual friends who knew about my interest in folklore. At first, I was interested in Khīra's singing ability because I was told she had a good voice and knew a large repertoire of female traditional songs. But soon I realised that tale-telling was another of her talents. However, I only managed to record three sessions with her, as she suddenly fell ill and was taken to hospital for treatment. Despite her strict observance of Islam, (something for which she is highly respected), she is considered "a first class entertainer", and is in great demand at wedding ceremonies and family celebrations. This is because she is an authority in and has an extensive knowledge of *qwā'id*, 'traditional rules', and has an extensive knowledge of various stories and religious songs, according to her brother's wife (Le Bardo, 17/3/90). There is a strong moralizing and religious dimension to her repertoire.

1.10. The tales

The original corpus is not affected by any process of selection. I tried to tap the full depth of the narrators' repertoires. The bulk of the corpus (62

stories) has been deployed in the analysis. As common themes emerged through reading, a number of tales either did not appear to contribute to the major themes or were clearly oriented not to the presentation of images of women to women but were children's animal stories that fell out as the direction of discussion became clearer. Thus twelve of the sixty two collected are not dealt with in the discussion that follows.

The tales are in Tunisian urban dialect. Some linguistic characteristics may be identified as regional (see chapter two).

A distinction is made by the narrators between *khrafāt* 'fantasy stories' and *hkāyāt bilminjad* 'true stories', and *nukat* 'anecdotes' which relate authentic or fictitious incidents (see discussion of tales in chapter seven). The anecdote mostly does not exceed a page.

The tales present a certain number of characteristic features. Most common is a verbal formula at the beginning and end, serving to embellish the narration. Not all the tales in this collection, it should be noted, begin with an opening formula or end with a closing one. The formulae are only used in fantasy stories. Such formulae display rhyming prose and include maxims and proverbial phrases.

The great majority of the tales chosen (42 out of 50) have a woman as the main protagonist, who takes the initiative in speech and action. On the basis of Baklouti's (1988) collection of tales from men and women, the tendency with female narrators is also to concentrate primarily on female protagonists.

It is clear from the present corpus that women constitute the central focus as protagonists in the stories. As Sa'diyya put it "when we talk about women we know our ground and we have to say a lot about them because we are women ourselves" (Sa'diyya, interview, 5/2/90). Women devote

themselves to a certain kind of story-telling which is extremely absorbing to other women. Women, it appears are very concerned to learn about other women.

1.11. Data analysis.

This study is based primarily on field research material, recorded oral narratives and oral statements from these three women, Ghāya, Khīra and Sa'diyya. In the elaboration of a method I was stimulated by narrator-oriented studies particularly one carried out by Pentikainen (1978) in Finland focussing on a story-teller and her repertoire performed over an extended period of time. In collecting and studying the repertoire of Marina Takalo (1890-1970) Pentikainen considered her attitude, interpretation and world view. She also studied how Marina received, preserved and transmitted oral tradition and found out that idiosyncratic elements of personality and personal history seemed to be transmitted in her repertoire. "Marina Takalo's repertoire did not seem to be any stable, unchangeable whole, rather it appeared to change in accordance with the development of the individual personality and the epochs of her life history" (Pentikainen 1978: 269).

My major concern in this study is to go beyond a conception of the tale divorced from its social context and, following Pentikainen's example, to view it ethnographically and in relation to its teller, in order to discover the individual, social and cultural factors that give it meaning. More specifically, my subject matter is female tale-telling and the relationship between the tales and the tellers in the light of their individual life experiences. The tales are, no doubt, creations for enjoyment and amusement, but they are more than an aesthetic discourse. They are a part

of a social discourse well integrated into women's lives. Idiosyncratic elements of personality are transmitted through the tales. The women relate their repertoires to their life experiences and their tales constitute a window for personal expression.

What is specifically female about this art form? What are these women saying about themselves and the society they live in through their tales?

Edwin Ardener (1972, 1975) has tried to outline a model of woman's culture. His two essays, "Belief and the problem of women" (1972) and "The problem revisited" (1975) suggest that women constitute a 'muted group'. The concept of silence is central to women's expression. For a long time the correlation of language with power has been relevant to women's lives. Ardener has suggested that dominant groups control the forms or structures in which consciousness can be expressed. Thus "muted groups must mediate their beliefs through allowable forms of dominant structures" (Ardener 1975: xi). In his view women find expression through ritual and art. His view borne out by the data in this study in which women, clearly 'muted', find an alternative mode of discourse to express their beliefs and emotions.

Sharabi (1988) discusses the reign of what he terms "neo-patriarchal discourse" which may be expressed in different forms and articulated in different voices. He explains how while the structure of the language reinforces authority and hierarchy, it also produces "oppositional forms typical of the neo-patriarchal discourse: gossip, backbiting, story-telling and silence" (Sharabi 1988: 88).

The act of narration by women is a way of reflecting the need for women to have a voice and to express true consciousness. Through examining this narration we gain knowledge of the women's perceptions of themselves and their world and of the way they criticize and comment upon their culture. Through the use of memory their young adult life is

recounted and we learn what it meant to be a woman in their society and the truth about a woman's world which has been suppressed.

The tales reflect prevailing moral standards. And yet they display attitudes and explore relationships and practises that are sometimes in total contradiction to social norms. They empower women to transcend the bounds of social conventions. Through the use of fantasy, armed with the freedom to say what they please, we learn of their ambitions and aspirations.

Oral texts are admittedly fictional. But according to Hamilton (1987) what is understood by a society to be fictitious can still constitute a source for the history of that society.

This female art form purposefully and collectively concerns itself with the articulation of women's experiences and fulfills a need for self-expression. The women's voices contained within the tales do not reveal a unified discourse. We note that the narrators, according to their own temperament, disposition, and degree of emancipation or adherence to tradition, have different attitudes. They entertain substantially different views of themselves, their social reality and their aspirations which are deeply affected by their personalities. The tales also interestingly can be shown to reflect, in their variation the individual problems and concerns of the individual narrators, but also those of their female audiences.

Sometimes the content of the tales is not as important as the fact that women paradoxically can be judges, mediators and interpreters of individual and social reality. The tales can be used to elicit statements about features in the culture that are not made readily. Each judgement is 'political', by which I mean it represents an attitude vis-a-vis the social world.

Admittedly, this approach could be said to favour the informants' subjective view of the events and the social reality they describe. But, as pointed out by Le Grand (1990), "cette subjectivité reprochée n'est jamais strictement individuelle." One could speak of a shared subjectivity, yet it is no doubt possible to go beyond it to grasp an underlying reality without falling into broad generalisation.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RURAL/URBAN DICHOTOMY

A DIMENSION IN THE DEFINITION OF THE BELDI

This chapter begins with a brief historical presentation about Tunis and its inhabitants, "the Beldi". Then it goes on to portray them as they are viewed in the tales by the narrators themselves.

2.1. A 'civilized culture' - historical background

Tunisia has a long tradition of city life going back to the cities built by the Romans and the Muslims. Historically, Tunisia is one of the world's crossroads. The Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Andalusians and Turks all entered North Africa through Tunis. Under the Phoenicians and through many foreign influences Tunisia acquired a cosmopolitan character and became an important city in the Mediterranean. The Arab invasion started in the 7th century. Arab rule was established in 697 (Abun-Nasr 1987). Despite the presence of a strong Berber culture, the Arabic language was spoken by all and the vast majority embraced Islam with the exception of a Jewish community. When Islam became firmly established, it brought with it ideas of civilization and culture, and built up centres of religious learning, craftsmanship and commerce. Kairouan was to become, by the end of the 8th century, an important centre of religious learning and industrial activity. Tunis was founded by Ibn al-Nu'mān and he intended it to become the base for the Arab fleet in the Maghrib (Abun-Nasr 1987: 31), and another centre of learning and of various commercial crafts and activities. By the end of the 13th century Tunis had already achieved a reputation for the brilliance of its urban civilization. Arabic culture had

had a great effect on the indigenous population and left an indelible mark on the country. Between the 13th and 17th centuries, groups of Muslim and Jewish Spanish refugees came to settle in Tunisia and made an important contribution to the pre-existing cultural matrix. Turkish rule lasted three centuries and Tunisia's most recent history has been marked by the French colonization which ended with the declaration of independence in 1956.

2.1.1. Social fabric in the 18th and 19th Century

Tunisia's population was estimated to have been about one million in the middle of the 18th century and the city to have been 18% of the total (Valensi 1977: 13). During the early years of Ottoman rule the urban society of Tunis was already divided into a large number of Beldi family spheres of influence, dominating prestigious and lucrative branches of economic life (Abun-Nasr 1987: 174). Religious learning, the holding of prominent religious offices and the monopoly of certain crafts were the means through which families acquired noble social status. The Beys (hereditary rulers of the country), were associated with the leading Beldi families and with their authority in the city. This gave them more prestige and power. The establishment of the French Protectorate at the end of the 19th century and resulting socio-economic changes played a significant role in modifying the demographic map of Tunis. The attraction of city living and the services offered and public utilities accelerated the immigration of the rural population. By the end of the 19th century a bourgeoisie had already emerged with a relatively high standard of living and a sophisticated way of life. Through colonization many of the Beldi elite retained their prestige and power, and the French Protectorate consolidated their position. They were government officials, prestigious

Shaykhs 'religious leaders', craftsmen and merchants monopolizing 'noble crafts'. The outsiders lacked an urban style of life and tended to be tanners, shoemakers, blacksmiths, hired workers and labourers.

The Beldi maintained a local and national reputation for being cultured and refined. Their reputation persisted, but as the population increased through immigration, the Beldi's self esteem grew. Scholars, merchants and craftsmen held in common their identity as cultured and civilized and looked down upon all outsiders. In his book *Catégories de la Société Tunisoise dans la deuxième moitié du XIX^{eme} Siècle*, Ben Achour (1989) explains that the Beldi's sense of worth and their disdain for outsiders is derived from the city being a prestigious economic, religious and cultural centre.

Tunis a la fois capitale économique et politique et métropole intellectuelle de l'Islam, prestige de la grande mosquée, l'université Al-Zaytuna, la prospérité de son artisanat et de son commerce, le privilège que les Beys husseinites eurent l'habileté d'accorder a la population Tunisoise, tout cela avait contribué a créer chez les habitants de la cité un sentiment de fierté et un comportement marqué de dédain vis-a-vis les *barraniyya*, étrangers des autres villes et a plus forte raison des campagnes (Achour 1989: 137).

2.2. Defining the Beldi

In a report about 'the council of Tunis', Cleveland and William described the Beldi as "the traditional Arab bourgeoisie whose economic power was based on their monopolistic control of bustling handicraft industries, whose social prestige was related to the nobility of their particular crafts

and their self view as the protectors of authentic Arab Islamic tradition" (Cleveland and William 1978: 39).

The picture of the Beldi to be presented here will be based on the evidence of the tales.

2.2.1. Highly ranked positions

In the tales, the world of the domestic and the familial is the world of women, the public domain is dominated by men. Women and girls are involved in traditional female occupations, housekeeping, cooking, and with a few exceptions sewing, embroidery and spinning wool.

Men's occupations are associated with the city. They range from '*ulama* 'religious leaders, *qāḍis* 'judges', *amīn* 'guild chiefs', and varied *tujjārs*, silkweavers, and perfumers. All are predominantly Beldi. In late 19th and early 20th century Tunisia, most of these occupations were hierarchical in their organisation.

Among the various categories of crafts, there were noble crafts and base ones. The domination of the Beldi over certain crafts was apparent. The crafts were ranked according to several criteria, the most crucial of which seems to be the type of people who practise them. In most cases highly valued and socially prestigious occupations were those engaged in by members of families long established and respected in the city. They consisted of the manufacture of the *Shahiyya*, 'red knitted cap' and trade in perfume, silk, and gold. The *shashiyya* and *hrīr*, 'silk' industry, for instance, was run by large-scale family businesses and owed its prestige to the fact that many who engaged in it belonged to long established urban families.

The base crafts such as tanning, metalwork and the like were generally denigrated and were left for the outsiders. My informant, Ghāya, puts special emphasis on the Beldiness of certain crafts, and denigrated other crafts because those involved in them were outsiders: *ṣnā'it al-ḥrīr we al-shashiyya we al-sarajīn we al-'atūrāt Baldiyya we luxkhrīn, al-dabbāgha mta' al-ḥaftarīsh*, 'the industry of silk, knitted caps, and perfumes are for the Beldi, and tanning and the like are for the "Boor", meaning the outsiders (Ghāya, Interview, 12/2/1989).

On the other hand there are only two references to base crafts in two tales: 'the Crazy Old Woman' (tale R15), where the central character is a mad old woman who, thinking she would help her daughter with the dirty bed sheets and clothes, takes them to the tanner round the corner to be dyed, and 'the Fisherman's Daughter' (tale S9). Both occupations are held by outsiders.

The internal organisation of the crafts is hierarchical. This is also reflected in the tales. At the top of the hierarchy stands an *amīn al-tujjār*, 'chief of guild', i.e. association of persons with common professional interests (tale S26). Most of the master craftsmen, workers and apprentices were affiliated to guilds which had an *amīn*, 'chief', chosen by the members to represent them vis-a-vis the authorities of the city (Ben Hamouda 1983). Next in the hierarchy come the master craftsmen, (silkweavers, *shashiyya* manufacturers, etc.), apprentices and workers (tale R4, S12).

The *Medīna* 'old city' was the residence centre of the Beldi élite and "the centre of complex noble-crafts for urbane clientèle" (Collins 1955: 168). In the corpus discussed here, the tales give a picture of the social

circumstances of the late 19th and early 20th century Beldi as they predominated in highly ranked crafts such as the *Shashiyya*, silk and perfume. In the tales many Beldi are portrayed engaged in varied crafts namely, perfume merchants, *Shashiyya*-makers, silkweavers, jewellers, carpenters, shoemakers. The economic power of the Beldi was not only based on the monopoly of certain crafts, but also on property and landholdings.

2.2.2. Property and clientage in agriculture

Owning a house within the ramparts of the *Medīna*, was an indication of one's deep-rootedness in the city. Indeed, almost without exception, every family owned a house, and a man's additional assets might lie in other houses, land and property, as the following tale summary exemplifies.

The Beldi and the Sharecropper (Summary R18)

Once upon a time there was a landlord who owned a house in the old city and a *sāniya*, 'market garden' in Mornag within a few miles of Tunis, and employed a *khammās*, 'sharecropper', to work his land. The share cropper would arrive on Thursday, late at night, have dinner and spend the rest of the night at his landlord's. Early in the morning he would head for the Friday Market to buy and sell animals and agricultural products. At the end of the day, he would share the money with the landlord, and provide himself with the goods of the city; clothes, headscarves, perfume and *kohl*, 'black eyeliner', for his wife and sisters. One day, as he was going back home the landlord instructed him to bring him fresh milk, eggs and butter next time he came to the city. The man climbed the mountain of Oueslāt and yelled back at the Beldi, 'You the Beldi,

you always ask me to bring you fresh produce; here I am a long way from you!
come and catch me if you can!"

It is not unusual in Tunis for a Beldi to own a piece of land and have it cultivated on a share-cropping basis. Indeed, in the early 20th century and until Independence in 1956, it was quite common for the élite among the Beldi of high status to own fertile agricultural property within a few miles of the city and employ sharecroppers from the peasantry who then supplied them weekly with cereals, fresh dairy produce, fruit and vegetables (Ben Achour 1989). The separation between the Beldi and the peasants was reinforced by the fact that they tended to reside in separate districts, although linked still by economic exchanges.

The *Medīna* sheltered the newly arrived immigrants by allotting various fringes to the rural immigrants in its Northern and Southern Faubourgs. The centre around the mosque of the prestigious *souqs* had remained the domain of the true 'Tunisois' (Collins 1955: 169).

Some landholdings did bind some of the peasants to urban landlords. The latter went regularly to the countryside to receive supplies of wheat, meat, etc. while the peasants came to the city to sell their produce and provide themselves with the goods of the city. However they were still disdainfully looked down upon as 'primitive'. Townspeople consider themselves more sophisticated and 'civilized', an opinion to which the majority of outsiders readily acquiesce. The Beldi make jokes about the slowness of the outsiders and their manners.

2.3. Portrait of the Beldi

The social categories by which Tunisians identify themselves most readily are the family and the city of origin. This provides, in most contexts, the duality necessary for differentiation, for the cleavage and opposition between the *US* and *THEM*.

The material collected from three female narrators, all from the urban community, present two similar highly stereotyped, unsubtle and clear-cut images of the Beldi as against others: They portray the Beldi as *US*, the highly refined and cultured people of Tunis juxtaposed to *THEM*, characterised as "primitive outsiders".

The question to be asked is, how is the difference expressed? What terms are used to indicate that 'they' are different from 'us'?

A pair of oppositional terms are employed to refer to townspeople and outsiders. The people of Tunis refer to themselves and are referred to as 'the Beldi' as opposed to all outsiders lumped together as *Barraniyya*, 'Arab, used in the sense of 'outsiders'.

The term 'Beldi' is highly charged and has a specific meaning and various evaluative implications when used to distinguish the people of Tunis from their neighbours. In most contexts it implies the Beldi's claim to deeply-rooted origin in the city and a constellation of urbane qualities that could be captured in terms of modes of interaction, manners, dress, speech, cuisine and life style. An attempt will be made to define and detail this code as it is presented in the tales.

2.3.1. The 'bottom of the Jar'

The Beldi identify themselves as a community. When they proudly vaunt its excellence, they justify themselves primarily by referring to their deep-rootedness in the city. They place a high value on their historical heritage and their 'highly civilized culture'. The metaphor used to describe the community is *Qā'al-jarra*, 'the bottom of the jar'. In the tale 'Long Live the Beldi' (tale R17), a polygamous man is married to four women from different regions of Tunisia. His Beldi wife is referred to as 'a Beldi from the bottom of the jar'. In yet another tale, 'the Peasant' (tale R6), a qāḍi, 'judge', is referred to as the son of 'the bottom of the jar'. In Tunisia the jar is often used to store olive oil. The lighter oil floats and the best of the oil stays at the bottom. The metaphor means that the oil which stays at the bottom is the best and thus the Beldi resemble the purest and richest olive oil.

2.3.2. Origin and history of settlement in the city

In the above discussion I have tried to indicate the significance accorded to history and urbanity in accounting for the distinctiveness maintained by the Beldi. The main feature of interrelation described in the tales is that the Beldi are superior and the outsiders inferior. This is most clearly seen in the following tales.

In the tales (R6, R17, R18; S15, K5) characterisation is marked by highly stereotyped negative images of 'the outsider', which constitute for the Beldi a 'vivid other' providing a convenient foil for self definition. By looking at how the Beldi characterize the outsiders as compared with themselves, I hope to isolate the markers of 'Beldiness'.

Long live the Beldi, (summary R 17)

Once upon a time there was a polygamous Beldi who was married to four women from different regions of Tunisia, one black from Gabes, one from the island of Jerba, (both in the south of Tunisia), one bedouin peasant and one Beldi 'from the bottom of the jar'. After a few years of marriage, the husband grew tired of a polygamous household, quarrels and jealousy between the co-wives, and decided to put an end to it by testing his wives to choose the best. The test consisted of four questions assessing the wives' wit, taste and cuisine. The Beldi wife proved the wittiest, the most pious, with the best taste. He eventually kept her and repudiated the others.

The Peasant (summary R6).

Once upon a time there was a naive bedouin man who did not prove worthy to inherit his father's status after his death. So he took his share of the estate and decided to come and settle in the city. He soon took a decision to marry the daughter of a Beldi family and become a member of the Beldi community. To facilitate his integration, he sought the help of an elderly woman to teach him the good manners of the Beldi. But the outsider proved too crude to polish and failed to behave like a true Beldi. Soon after the marriage, the young bride asked for a divorce.

The two tales are important because they highlight the traits which have been consistently important in the Beldi's view of themselves and the outsiders. In the first tale, the difference between the Beldi and the non-Beldi is manifest in the physical, the sartorial and the linguistic, as well as

in the very nature of their mode of life and background. The second tale carries the point that Beldi qualities are not easily acquired, or perhaps 'not acquirable'.

2.3.3. The physical and the sartorial

The narrator, in 'Long Live the Beldi' (tale R17), sets the tone by portraying the man's wives except the Beldi one, as *ḥmūm we khḍurr fi al-maliya*, 'dark and green with tattoos in their ethnic dress'. The Beldi woman is described as fair-skinned and different in manner and appearance.

His other wives were dark and green with tattoos, wearing their *maliya*, 'bedouin female dress', but his Beldi wife was fair and radiant, with good smooth light skin, breeding and manners and *rīshat al-Baldiyya*, 'a touch of class' (tale R17).

In Ghāya's view, the good qualities are: fine features, fair hair and smooth light skin and 'the touch of class'. The image corresponds to something more general, namely the ideal beauty to which the Beldi woman aspires. The negative portrayal of the non-Beldi women as 'dark and green with tattoos' emphasizes the Beldi's conception of the non-Beldi as inferior and reflects their wish to be in every way superior. In Tunisia in every day use, a bedouin peasant is sometimes referred to as 'green', meaning uncouth, crude and naive. The description denotes clear-cut, readily identifiable physical groups: the Beldi as fair with 'refined' features and the non-Beldi as dark. Indeed the Beldi see themselves as a special 'breed' of people, immediately recognisable to one another by their fair

complexion, sartorial elegance and a 'touch of class', a highly evaluative term.

The group determines itself by distinctive physical features. A lively wit, superior taste and extreme piety are further traits distinguishing them.

2.3.4. Taste and wit

In 'Long live the Beldi' (tale R17), to assess their wit, piety and taste in food the women are asked four questions: what are their favourite dishes, dwellings and names and how they would tell night from day.

Some of the answers to the husband's questions indicate typical rural styles of life and carry strongly evaluative implications. Some of the replies on the other hand, demonstrate a difference in the women's piety, wit and taste, as will be explained. All the women's answers reflect their background, character and everyday experience.

The Jerbi woman's favourite dwelling is a *ḥūsh* 'traditional type of habitation with a cellar'. Her favourite name is *Yaḥyia* and dish *tarfīs and tarfūs*, 'a mixture of ground wheat, sultana nuts and olive oil', both typical of the Island of Jerba. And she distinguishes night from day by "when the cattle sleep and the cockroaches come out".

The bedouin woman also gives similar answers drawn from her peasant background and every-day experience. Her favourite name is *Ṣālah*; her preferred dish chicken is *couscous*, 'steamed semolina served with meat and vegetable stew', and her best habitation a *dār bla fjāj*, a 'straw and mud hut without a door'. And she recognizes night from day when the cattle sleep and the sheep wake.

The Jerbi and bedouin women's answers are highly charged with evaluative implications. In everyday use, the name *Şālah* and *Yahyia* commonly refer to an uncouth and crude 'arbi', (bedouin/peasant). From a Beldi point of view, *tarfis* and *tarfūs* is peasant-like and coarse food and a proper *couscous* is cooked with lamb. As regards habitation, a *dār*, 'house', without a door is considered a total lack of civility. The behaviour of animals influence both women's lives and sense of time, their hours of sleeping and working: they rise and sleep with them.

The portrayal of the black woman from Gabès has further racist overtones. Her answers to some of the questions reflect her subservient position. Her favourite dwelling is a *kumāniyya*, 'a room usually reserved for black servants in Beldi houses'; Her favourite name is *Mabrūka* which is a typical black servant's name. To the last question as to how she would tell night from day, she answers, "when her master asks for the chamber-pot".

The Beldi woman's answers to the questions reveals an urbanized taste, an eye for luxury and most of all, an extreme piety. Her favourite dwelling is a *dār bil- 'ali*, 'a traditional urban two-storey house with a balcony equipped with *musharabia* which allows one to see without being seen'. Her favourite dish is *ftāt 'al-mri*, 'an expensive rich and nutty kind of pastry' which is a real Beldi delicacy. Her favourite names are Moḥamed and 'Ali, the names of two major Muslim Prophets. And she distinguishes night from day by "when the *Muezzin* calls for prayer in Mecca the home of the Prophet Moḥamed, God bless him and give him salvation".

The main characteristics that are alluded to through the Beldi woman's answers are liveliness of wit, good taste, and her piety. Her main concern



seems to be the observance of religion. The times of prayer regulate and ritualize her daily flow of time and her language is filled with spirituality and formulae containing the name of God and the prophet, a quality that is missing in the other women's language.

All non-Beldi women's answers lack the urban refinements of vivacity, finesse of language and taste. The husband's decision to keep his Beldi wife and repudiate the others is a recognition of her superiority in terms of taste, wit and piety.

This tale clearly highlights a number of characteristics which situate the Beldi physically and culturally. The emphasis placed on religious practice, refined taste and style of life among the Beldi which shows that these features play an especially crucial role in the Beldi's self-view of their cultural superiority. Religious practice and religious formulae are inherent in so much of their routine behaviour and activities. All three narrators carry out their five daily prayers. Religious formulae containing the name of God and the Prophet are regularly invoked, making up a distinctive part of their language. A common invocation is *al-şbāḥ şabbah willi yişali 'ala al-nabi yirbah*, used to express the hope that the new day would bring success, and *bi qudrat allāh*, to express that all things are subjected to God's will.

The second tale cited above (R6) continues the Beldi's criticism of the outsiders described here as lacking in cleanliness, civility, common sense and refined manners and language. At the same time they claim that these are Beldi traits.

The outsider is portrayed as a dirty and crude person who has never come across an indoor toilet and never worn shoes, with bad manners and

bearing towards people. In his 'house training' period before the wedding his initiator, an elderly woman, first bathes him, throws his peasant garb away and replaces it with Beldi clothing. She then tries to teach him the Beldi code of behaviour, giving him prohibitions and recommendations if he does not want to be mocked by the Beldi. The rules consisted of waiting to be served when sitting at the ceremonial guests' feasting, using a knife and fork and showing respect and deference towards his in-laws. But the outsider makes a fool of himself and appears stupid and ignorant. On the wedding day, as is the tradition, after hours of feasting with the guests the bridegroom is taken to meet his bride for the first time. As he enters the bridal chamber he is portrayed in a tone of mockery, gazing in wonder and marvelling at the drapes and curtains decorating the walls and the silk stuffed pillows adorning the bridal bed. Looking at the pillows more closely he mistakes them for his donkey's panier. He makes a further spectacle of himself when he sits eating with the guests with his hands. Another example of the Bedouin's lack of good manners is when he goes to pay a courtesy visit to his sick mother-in-law. Instead of inquiring about her health and wishing her a prompt recovery, he asks "whether she is dead yet". The mother-in-law eventually dies of sorrow and shame inflicted on the family by contracting marriage with "an unsuitable, crude partner". The marriage breaks up as the bride cannot cope any longer with her husband's crudeness and ignorance.

The Beldi are the people of the 'civilized culture' and as such distinguish themselves from 'outsiders'. Their civilization expresses itself as mentioned above through a way of life, a pattern of behaviour, a manner of speech. Individuals are either included within, or excluded from this civilisation according to whether they conform to its social rules in their way of life or not. In the above mentioned example, the outsider could not

become woven into the fabric of the Beldi family because he failed to take on the traits that are considered the defining criteria of 'Beldi-ness' and the marriage eventually breaks up.

Two other marriages between Beldi and outsiders (tale S6, S2), end in failure as a result of the incompatibility of the couple's way of life and behaviour. One further example will be cited here:

Rdāh (summary R7)

Rdāh, the only daughter of the king of Tunis, broke her engagement with her cousin and decided to elope with the Arab bedouin Ḥmid

Al-Hilālī. Caught up in some tribal affairs, Ḥmid sent two men to kidnap her on his behalf. The journey to Ḥmid's house was long and tiring, and the two crude bedouins took turns harassing the girl and abusing her. When she reached Ḥmid's house, Rdāh was already dying.

Rdāh, a member of the upper class, has been leading a leisurely and refined life in a luxurious castle and has been taught refined manners and behaviour. The two bedouins are not respectful and abuse her. On her death bed, Rdāh explains that the difference between her and Ḥmid killed her,

I am the softness and you are the dagger, we are poles apart! This is my real grief (tale R7).

The characterisation of the outsider as 'ignorant' is provided in yet another tale, 'the Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2).

The Vizier's Daughter (summary R2).

Once upon a time there was a king who was so fond of his vizier that he trusted him with all the major and minor affairs of the throne, which made his other advisors very jealous. So they decided to put false ideas in the king's head. He soon turned against the vizier and decided to put him to the test three times. But every time the vizier got by with the help of his cunning and witty young daughter. Defeated, and hearing about the daughter's wisdom, the king decided to take her as a bride.

One of the challenges put to the vizier is to produce cooked food that has never been set on fire and carried by four cows on their heads. Fresh baby lamb is selected and cooked on rocks and slaked lime. Four outsiders are chosen to carry the meal as they are unable to answer simple questions about their names, age and time of the year.

An ignorant and illiterate person is commonly referred to locally as *bagra*, 'a cow'. In this tale the outsiders are pejoratively referred to as 'cows' meaning stupid, because they are unable to answer simple questions. The Beldi's estimate of rural backwardness is based partly on stereotypes and partly on some very real differences in education.

The Beldi's view of the outsider as it stands in the tales discussed above, is that he is raggedly dressed with no shoes (tale R2); dirty (tale R6); ignorant (tale R6, R2); crude and primitive (tale R6); lacking in piety (tale R17); lacking in refined manners and bearing towards other people (tale R6, S15). The tales claim that the opposite are Beldi traits. Stereotypes and prejudices referring to categorisation of observed cultural differences

are frequently held. In its extreme form such as displayed in these tales the defamatory intention of the narrators reflects the wish of the Beldi to be in every respect superior.

In his book *Two-Dimensional Man*, Cohen (1974) deals with power relations and symbolic action in a complex society. His discussion focuses on the processes whereby interest groups manipulate different types of symbolic patterns of action to articulate a number of organizational functions, like distinctiveness, when they cannot organize themselves on formal lines.

To operate effectively, a group must define its identity and its exclusiveness, within the political field in which it operates (Cohen 1974: 69).

Every political group must have symbols of distinctiveness, i.e. of identity and exclusiveness defining its boundaries (Cohen 1974: 26).

Distinctiveness is thus achieved in different symbolic forms. Cohen defines symbols as "objects, acts, relationship or linguistic formation occurring in patterns of activity, ritual, ceremonial, gift exchange, acts of etiquette, eating and drinking, and various cultural traits that constitute the style of life of a group..." (Cohen 1974: 32).

Cohen presents among other things, mythology of descent, moral exclusiveness, ritual and belief practices and styles of life as powerful strategies used by a group to define its boundaries. The Beldi articulate their distinctiveness in terms of many of the same ways Cohen discusses. These ways have been instrumental in developing their boundaries and

distinguishing them from the outsiders. I have discussed earlier how the Beldi articulate their distinctiveness in term of a symbolic principle of single genealogy, claiming that their community has descended from common ancestors long established and deeply-rooted in the city. Their exclusiveness is enhanced by the adoption of a sophisticated style of life and manners which distinguish them further from the non-Beldi.

In addition to the articulation of descent, the style of life is a mechanism for achieving distinctiveness. Cohen adds that "the members of a group may adopt external distinguishing signs like facial marking, special hair style, special clothes. They may live in an exclusive neighborhood, distinct in their housing style, furniture and decoration. They may also be distinct from other groups in developing special manners, etiquette, speech accent..." (Cohen 1974: 74). In Tunis a refined code of 'savoir vivre', a distinctive dialect, a distinctive urbane dressing style, and a refined cuisine, are further markers of "Beldiness".

2.3.5. Savoir vivre

Table manners (tale R6), rules of address (tale R1, K1), respect for elders (tale S4), all form part of the refined code of savoir vivre which is considered a hallmark of 'Beldi-ness', a reputation which is consciously invoked and reinforced in the tales, to ensure that they are judged by others according to the image they have of themselves.

2.3.5.1. Address

In the tales collected, *Lilla*, 'Madam', and *Sīdi*, 'Sir/Mister', were the polite terms of address between Beldi men and women. Husbands address their wives a *Lilla Fātma*, for instance, and wives address their husbands as *Sīdi Moḥamed*.

He called her *lilla*, and she called him *sīdi* (tale R1, R13; K1; S18).

2.3.5.2. Respect for elders

Respect shown by the young for their elders is an important value which constitutes the basic mode of interaction between the Beldi generations. Examples of the young showing respect and deference to their elders are numerous. In the tale 'Fṭayṭma' (tale R4) and 'The Wicked Mother-in-law' (tale S23), for example, a young married man in difficulty, instead of confronting the wickedness of his mother, turns to an elderly man to help him find a solution and put an end to the ill-treatment of his wife by his mother. For her part, the young bride, in spite of her mother-in-law's ill-treatment, is polite and respectful. She never complains as "she is the daughter of a Beldi 'āyla, family'. Such families consider it most important for a girl not to show arrogance or disrespect towards her elders", as Ghāya commented (tale R4).

2.3.6. Dialect

The Beldi are mutually recognisable by a typical urban dialect which is quite distinctive from other regional dialects in a number of respects. In Tunis the outsider is automatically recognised and stigmatised with the pejoratively and culturally-loaded attribute 'arbi', meaning unrefined and crude. Most immigrants who want to integrate themselves into Beldi circles drop their heavy regional accent especially the [g], and pick up the urban dialect if they hope to further themselves socially and professionally. It is not the purpose of this study to give an exhaustive description of the dialect. It is differentiated at all levels i.e. phonological,

grammatical and lexical from other Tunisian dialects. But I shall concentrate on salient features which recur in the tales. The narrators themselves are native speakers of this upper-class Beldi dialect. But on occasions they imitate rural lower class dialect. For example, in 'urban dialect', the voiceless uvular plosive [q], is used instead of 'the rural' voiced velar plosive [g].

In the tale 'the Peasant', (tale R6), the bedouin peasant in his 'house training' before his marriage with the Beldi girl is given various recommendations to facilitate his integration into the Beldi family. An important one is to drop his regional shibboleth [g], and pick up the Beldi urban [q].

Another characteristic of the Beldi dialect is the use of diphthongs, i.e. [bayt] 'room' instead of [bi:t], *baytna hrīr wa baytkum kittān* 'our house is made of silk and yours of linen', (opening formula by Sa'diyya). Diphthongs are used in verbs, i.e. *mshayt* 'I went' (tale S1), in substantives, i.e. 'aynayn 'eyes' (S27), in adjectives, *bayḍa* 'white' (tale R17), in dual nouns, *marrtayn* 'twice', 'āmayn 'two years' (tale R1; K2), *shahrayn* 'two months' (R16). There are also numerous lexical differences which emerge in the three narrators' dialect; one important feature is the use of *āna*, 'I', rather than *āni*. Many other instances of lexical differences are due to borrowing from French, Spanish and Turkish, such as: *cafātiriya* 'coffee pot' (tale R2), *sikritu* 'secret', (R2) *knastru* 'basket' (tale R2), *karakūz* 'spectacle' (R6). In urban dialect the use of the diphthong [ay], is exclusively used by women, and particularly common among the older generations. Cohen defines it as follows:

Le parler des femmes dans Tunis, des vieilles generations tout au moins, se distingue de celui des hommes entre autre traits, par celui

de la conservation des anciennes diphtongues, *bayt* ou *mawt* pour les formes qu'un homme réalise: *bit* et *mut*. (Cohen 1972: 65).

The diphthong [ay] is stereotypically a woman's feature but some Beldi men use it. Because of [ay], as well as the use of some lexical terms, the Beldi, men in particular, are stigmatised by people from other towns and often characterised as effeminate. Its use is felt to be effeminate, and nowadays men try to avoid it. Speakers of other dialects criticize Beldi men and women, particularly their use of the diphthong, so that pressure to eliminate the sound is exerted from the present mixed speech community. The position is such that one may be noticing a linguistic change in progress leading towards the elimination of the diphthongs altogether in the speech of both males and females especially among the new generations. In her thesis on the language of women of Tunis, Trabelsi explains that the decrease in the use of diphthongs among women is due to geographic mobility and mixing.

Le parler Beldi féminin perd de plus en plus de terrain face à "l'invasion" des parlers régionaux exogènes. Ce brassage régional et sexuel de la génération tunisoise a rétréci le champ d'emploi des diphtongues à Tunis (Trabelsi 1988: 253).

Social and geographical mobility have naturally effected a certain levelling of Tunisian dialect. Thus features that are traditionally thought of as characteristics of the Beldi dialect are in fact increasingly found in other dialects and vice versa.

During my contacts with the narrators, I had the feeling that, in their speech, they attach great prestige to the use of [ay]. It is true that, for whatever reason, they think that they still enjoy a higher status than people from neighbouring towns. Therefore, they often put special emphasis on this feature so as to mark their Beldi origin and show off their 'Beldi-ness.'

2.3.7. Dress

'The Peasant' (tale R6), is a tale about a bedouin peasant who wants to integrate himself into the Beldi community. One of several ways of Beldicizing' him is to make him adopt Beldi attire from head to toe. On his wedding night, he wears a traditional Beldi wedding costume which consists of two pieces: a *Jibba*, 'a kind of bat-wing medium length silk caftan', and a white *Barnūs*, 'a cloak'. He also wears a *Shashiyya Stambūli*, 'a Turkish Fez with a long tassel'.

A *qāḍi* (tale S15), is described wearing a white silk *Jibba* and a *Barnūs* of extreme elegance and refinement.

Female dress is also described in the tales, ranging from the traditional outdoor floor-length silk veil to sophisticated embroidered wedding and celebration costumes.

In the tale 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli (tale R13), the bride received a gift of a silver, striped, silk veil from her new husband. In the tale 'Teach me Beldi Manners' (tale S15), and 'the Peasant' (tale R6), the *qāḍi*'s wife is described leaving the Turkish Bath wrapped up in her white silk veil. The urban silk veil is extensively in use up to the present day in Tunis.

Traditional female costume is also described when 'Aysha, in 'The Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), wears a different traditional costume each time she

tricks her husband to seduce him. The costume consists of two pieces: a sleeveless waist length top and long baggy trousers in Turkish style, embroidered with gold thread and shining studs.

2.3.8. Cuisine

Many references are made in the tales to typically Beldi delicacies, viz, *al-Bazīn*, 'sweet and nutty kind of cooked cream', and *ftāt 'al-Mri*, 'intricate nutty pastry' (tale R17, R6).

The Beldi tables described range from a large variety of regular savoury and sweet dishes to special dishes, accomplished by professional hired cooks or by the mistress of the house. *Briks*, 'pastry envelopes containing seasoned eggs and meat, and fried in oil' open the meal, stuffed peppers and varied *tajīns*, 'a kind of Spanish omelette'; *Ragout sucré*, 'stew sweetened with chestnuts and dried nuts' (tale R10), and *Baqlāwa*, 'nutty pastry' to finish.

The only reference to non-Beldi cuisine is made in 'Long Live the Beldi' (tale R6). There a bedouin woman mentions *tarfīs and tarfūs*, 'a mixture of ground wheat, sultanas and olive oil', as her favourite dish.

In the narrators' views the Beldi are 'gourmets'. They like to entertain, eat well and with style. "Our wedding celebrations, family rejoicing and even mourning rituals are big occasions for savoury and sweet delicacies", Ghāya comments. "Indeed our cuisine is the legacy of several thousands of years of settlers; the Berbers, the Arabs, the Turks and most recently the French; each of these groups has added an ingredient and made it more varied"(Ghāya,Interview,12/2/1989).

2.3.9. A typically Beldi tradition

On different occasions in the tales there are references to typically Beldi rituals. I shall consider one of the prevalent customs associated with marriage.

The Beldi wedding is a long process marked by a series of rituals through which the bride has to go to take her place eventually as a wife. One of them is described in 'the Sparkling Maiden' (tale S20). It is called *qaṣṣān al-Dlāl*, meaning literally, 'putting an end to a girl's spoiling'. A few days before the wedding ceremony, the bride has to go through the ritual of hair cutting. The ritual is led by a 'mistress of ceremonies' who places the bride amidst her female kin, combs her hair and cuts it to medium length, chanting a ritual song.

It is a tradition among the Beldi, that at puberty the girl's long hair is tied and 'bandaged'. No girl is allowed to keep it loose and free until marriage. Keeping the hair tied is considered a modest quality of maidenhood. A maiden who does not observe the tradition jeopardises her reputation and may not be considered for respectable marriage. When a girl's marriage approaches, her hair is untied and cut in a ceremonial ritual to symbolize her passage from a life of spoiling by her parents to the responsibility of a household and children. The bride is now considered to have taken her place as a wife.

2.4. Concluding remarks

The Beldi's sense of collective identity as expressed in the tales is crystallised in opposition to the non-Beldi. The tales are ethnocentric in

that they take Beldi 'civilized culture' and values as the norm and reinforce them. Their sense of self importance, as I have discussed is related to their deep-rootedness in the city. Their self-view is as pious, urbane and highly civilized people mutually recognisable to each other by their fair complexion, refined features and manners and a *rīshat al-Baldiyya*, 'a touch of class'. They are also distinguished on the basis of their language, dress, cuisine, rituals. Ferchiou defined the Beldi as follows:

Le Beldi Tunisois est en quelque sorte le citadin par excellence, qui se distingue par l'habillement, le parler, l'art culinaire et les professions (Ferchiou 1975: 24).

Harris summed up the idea of an urban ethos thus:

An urban ethos may be said to exist when a people, consciously or unconsciously, abstractly or concretely, values, endorses and seeks to perpetuate the various urban traits of its culture (Harris 1956: 279).

In the pre-colonial and colonial period to be a Beldi was a prized status, a source of pride. After Independence being Beldi became a mixed blessing as Tunisia underwent significant changes. The impact of European expansion, the growth and movement of population, the new distribution of power (the new government being in the hands of provincial people), and the development of modern education and new ideas had wide social implications (Ben Hamouda-Cherif 1990). The majority of the Beldi worked as craftsmen, but changing economic conditions severely undermined most of the city's traditional crafts in the face of imported goods. The Beldi became, in a sense, 'declassé'. And the idea that the status of the individual was defined by the status of his group, appeared no longer to be the case (Ben Achour 1989). Today the notion of 'Beldi' has a

different significance: to many outsiders' Beldi' means lazy, pretentious and *wild nanāti*, 'mother's boys'. But there remains an identity to which the Beldi still refer in spite of the changes: their prestige is in fact more cultural than economic as J. Berque has pointed out: "Les traits culturels l'emportaient sur les traits économiques" (Berque 1962: 320).

CHAPTER THREE: TALES OF FABLES AND FACTS-THE NARRATORS AND THEIR WORLD

By definition narrative art requires a story and story-teller.

(Scholes and Kellogg 1966: 27)

3.1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to gain an insight into the world and world-view of the narrators by examining both their tales and their own lives and to place female story telling in the wider context of Tunisian society. Have women always predominated as story tellers? If so, how does this institutionalized speaking relate to the male tradition of story-telling and the institutionalized silencing that characterizes women's subordination in colonial and post-colonial Tunisian society?

A recent approach (Ben-Amos 1975, Pentikainen 1978, Dégh 1979, Bauman 1986, Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1989), has appeared in the last decade focusing on story telling as a cultural activity, with attempts to reveal what the storyteller brings to the performance. The object of this chapter is to relate the tales to their narrators in an attempt to gain insight into their world and world view. In my field work, I asked the narrators about their lives, their sources and the occasions of story telling. In the present collection, the narrators Sa'diyya, Ghāya, and Khīra occasionally freeze the narrative to inject personal remarks, and display great subjectivity and emotional empathy, making telling tales much more than mere entertainment, both a process of creativity and a means by which they comment upon and address cultural issues.

3.2. Repertoire and world-view

The repertoires should be seen in relation to the narrators. Indeed their life histories provide important sources for a complete understanding of their products. It is interesting to observe that the narrators, according to their own temperament, disposition, and degree of emancipation or adherence to tradition, have different attitudes. Analysing the prevalent themes in their repertory on the one hand, and considering the views and values expressed by asides as their personal opinions and statements on the other, can directly reveal their personalities and give an insight into their world and world view, as I shall demonstrate. The purpose is to show that in fact the tales that the narrators like to tell fit their life experiences and are very likely loaded with features and remarks that not only are individual to the narrators, but also reflect their views and the world of their female audiences.

Başgoz (1987), using data from Turkey, demonstrates that the digression (individual remark of the narrator), can express the ideology, values and worldview of the performer. Başgoz points to the fact that, apart from their identities as story tellers in everyday life, the performers have the role of fathers, religious men, etc.... During the performance, the plot line is sometimes temporarily suspended, and the tellers come to the foreground to speak in their own voice.

Thus the father, the religious man, or the political man remains silent during the performance. Internal and external stimuli, however, from time to time activate these other selves, let them come to the fore, intervene, and interrupt the narration. In such instances the storytelling personality becomes silent and the story

comes to a standstill. The narrator transfers the message of the story into a different channel, a different level of communication. This channel does not broadcast the story anymore, it becomes a personal channel where the narrator talks from and about himself. It is a direct access to the life story, psychology and the cognitive world of the narrator. He speaks about his own troubles He renders his judgement about the attributes and behavior of the story characters. He discloses his opinions, ideas, and values.... He criticizes like a social commentator (Başgoz 1987: 7).

The narrators select from a large corpus of tales they have heard over the years only the ones which appeal and are meaningful to themselves. I asked them to relate their favourite tales. The stories were not selected at random but according to their own personal inclinations, principles and relevance to their personal life and condition. This testifies to the fact that the narrators do not simply fulfill the role of transmitters of the oral tradition, but they are also creators and their choices reflect their personalities. The favourite stories of Ghāya, Sa'diyya, and Khira, cover patterns of genuine experience, and themes and topics, which the narrators seem particularly concerned with. At the same time they provide an excellent account of what it means to be a woman in their society.

3.3. The narrators' biographies

The following information about the narrators and their sources is based on material gathered during a series of interviews with them during my fieldwork in Tunisia from December 1989 to April 1990.

3.3.1. Ghāya

Ghāya is sixty, born and brought up in Tunis. She comes from a very wealthy, educated and deeply-rooted Beldi family where learning and traditional lore are revered. The family possesses hereditary social and political pre-eminence. 'Putting on airs' and projecting an exalted sense of self importance, Ghāya reports: "our family is '*arīqa*, 'old and deep-rooted' in the city, reputed to have distinguished itself by learning, piety and in government service". She traces the origin of her family to Muslim Spain: "*es-Sajāra* 'Our genealogy chart/family tree' is here to testify to it" (Ghāya, Interview, 10/1/1990). She proudly boasts an Andalusian ancestor who had been a *qāḍī*, and played an important role in the city's history. In fact, her own unusual name, *Ghāyat al-Muna*, 'the Heart's Desire', and those of her sisters, '*Abbāsa*, '*Būrāne*, and '*Umm al-'Ala*, are those of Andalusian princesses, chosen by her father from his extensive historical knowledge.

Her father was a noted scholar among the religious elite, who had an ardent interest in folklore and traditions and worked for the maintenance of traditional values and the survival of Beldi folklore. He was a teacher of Islamic law and history and travelled extensively in the Middle East attending Islamic conferences and meeting well-known '*Ulama* and leading personalities. His education offered him a variety of means of winning for himself prestige, clients and ultimately entrance to government service. He died in Algiers reading a paper at a conference. In his lifetime, he collected proverbs and wrote an impressive amount of material on Beldi tradition and folklore.

Ghāya was among the first privileged women who went to school at a time when girl's education was frowned upon. In the early part of the century, her father encouraged her and his other three daughters to pursue their

studies. She did her primary education in the *Medīna*, then her family, following the Beldi move to modern houses in the forties, acquired a new house in Sidi Bou Said, in the Northern suburbs of the city, and she attended a girl's convent school in Carthage until the age of seventeen when she graduated with a Brevet d'Etudes Secondaires. To her disappointment she did not take a job because at the time it was considered a disgrace for a respectable family to send their women to work outside the home. Only needy people would allow their women to work. 'I wanted to take a job as a schoolmistress or a secretary and use my knowledge, but my father, may he rest in peace, said: "Have I failed to see to your well being? I have always provided fine clothes and jewellery for all of you to wear and you are well-fed, you want the people to say I can't provide for my family!"' (Ghāya, Interview, 10/1/1990). In Tunis and in the Beldi milieu, a woman worked only when her family was in financial need and thus her working signified a lower economic status.

Her father held open house for students and colleagues. She became engaged at the age of seventeen to a handsome young eminent teacher. The engagement lasted three years. In the meantime Ghāya fell ill with pneumonia, to the dismay of the in-laws, who eventually broke off the engagement on the grounds of her ill-health. Ghāya was very aggrieved as she had grown fond of her fiancé. "At that time breaking an engagement would jeopardize a young girl's reputation and diminish her chances of finding a suitable suitor" (Ghāya, Interview, 10/1/1990).

The Beldi distinguish their way of life from the 'primitiveness' of others in the city, as well as the surrounding rural people. This did not hinder them nonetheless from seeking alliances with powerful rural families when it was in their interest. At the age of twenty-two, and in fear of not finding her a husband, her father married Ghāya off to a rich, hardly literate, outsider. Ghāya could only acquiesce. Soon after her marriage, she

moved to settle with her husband and his family in his home town of Zaghouan, forty kilometres to the south of Tunis. She had her first child the following year, and did not conceive again until sixteen years later, giving birth to a girl. Ghāya had to endure a great deal from her husband and in-laws and does not recollect being happy. "It was an unhappy marriage, may God forgive my father; we were as different as silk and rags. My sexual life was a total failure, I felt only revulsion for him, only patience and a deep belief in God helped me to overcome it. I wanted to divorce during the first years of my marriage, but on the one hand I did not want to disgrace my family and cause grief to my father in his lifetime, and on the other, I thought one victim was enough, I was ready to sacrifice my life for the sake of my child's happiness. I filled my heart with the love of God and his Prophet, peace be upon him"(Ghāya, Interview,10/101990).

When her father died, she inherited her share in the will, bought a house in La Marsa, in the northern suburbs, and moved there with her husband and has lived there up to the present date. Ghāya is extremely pious and never misses a prayer. She has been on pilgrimage twice. When I first went to visit her it was during the holy month of Ramaḍān and she was counting her beads in invocation of God's protection and oneness, and she did so on each following occasion.

3.3.1.1. Her sources

Ghāya learned her art from her own grandmother and Ḥbība Stambuliyya, the entertainer of the Bey (the hereditary ruler of the country). She was a professional story-teller of Turkish origin who was commissioned by the Bey, to entertain him and his court. Ghāya's mother was of noble origin and had connections with the Bey's family. After the Bey's deposition,

Ḥbība Stambuliyya was adopted by Ghāya's grandfather to entertain his only daughter, Sayyda Bent Moḥammad Shādli, her mother. Ghāya's grandmother was also a talented tale-teller who learned her art from her aunt and greatly benefited from the presence of Ḥbība Stambuliyya to extend her repertoire. Ghāya's father kept a personal library, and she used to read a lot. Her repertory is varied and also includes stories and anecdotes from written Arabic literature (al-Rumaykiyya, tale R8).

In Ghāya's life story two points stand out: on the one hand, the great importance attached to her self-image, i.e. her great pride in her Beldi background causing the failure of her marriage to an 'inferior' outsider; and her sense of wasted education on the other. Ghāya regrets her marriage as indicated in the quote above. She also regrets the fact that she was educated and yet confined to the house and forbidden to take a job; 'Şābra' (tale R1), 'the Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), 'Fṭayṭma' (tale R4), 'Long Live the Beldi' (tal17), 'the Peasant' (tale R6), 'Rdāḥ Umm Zāyed' (tale R7), exhibit the same concerns, themes and messages.

3.3.1.2. Her heroines

In 'Şābra' (tale R1), Ghāya relates the story of a young girl called Şābra, who was married off to a rich man who was able to satisfy her father's greed for money: three loads of gold as her bride price, one for her exceptional beauty, one for her wisdom and the third load for her patience. Resigned and patient, Şābra suffers the worst indignities from her husband, but endures and never complains or rebels. In fact her very name Şābra meaning 'patient' in Arabic echoes throughout the tale. She represents the essence of the feminine spirit. Ghāya elevates suffering and resignation into a female career and reinforces the traditional value system

requiring that women be patient and resigned. She identifies renunciation and patience with womanhood: "she is a woman; such is her lot, to endure with patience", Raya comments, *elli şabrit baytha 'imrit, bâhya it-tadhiya*, 'she who endures with patience will build a happy home, all sacrifice is good' (tale R1). Renunciation and patience are quintessential female virtues.

One can imagine the immediacy of Ghāya's identification with the heroine. The parallel between the life story of Ghāya and the tale of Şābra is remarkable. Ghāya was also married off to a rich man without her consent, has also endured hardship, and sacrificed herself so as not to disgrace her family and deprive her son of a father. Such a coincidence of story pattern with patterns of life experience makes for a highly charged symbol. The tale not only accounts for Ghāya's suffering, it opens a verbal ritual dramatization of her own life in literal and figurative terms. Likewise, 'Fṭayṭma' (tale R4), which relates also the sufferings of a young bride who was bullied and badly treated by her mother and sister in-law, is also Ghāya's story - a woman who finds it hard to live up to the life of negation demanded of her.

'Rdāḥ Umm Zāyed' (tale R7), 'the Peasant' (tale R6) and 'Long Live the Beldi' (tale R17), exhibit recurrent topics that are important to the narrator and of immediate relevance to her own situation, and great importance in her self image and that of the Beldi community. In her own voice Ghāya celebrates the Beldi identity, through their way of life, food, language and rituals. As indicated earlier, the tales portray the Beldi as religious, sophisticated and refined; and the *Barraniyya*, 'outsiders', as uncivilized and crude. Marriage contracted between the two parties is bound to fail. In 'the Peasant' (tale R6), the daughter of the Beldi family

who married an outsider could not cope with it and the marriage was eventually broken off.

Rdāḥ, the aristocratic and delicate Beldi girl dies of grief for having chosen Ḥmid al-Hilālī, the bedouin who had disregarded her rank and had left her to die in the hands of boorish peasants. She died saying: "A bird of the land cannot live over the sea, and silk and cotton are for the nobility and merchants. I am soft and he is rough. We are poles apart. That is my real grief." The narrator concludes: "it is hopeless, *al-ḥarīr w al-shkāra ma yitkhallṭūsh*, *hadhāka a'lāsh qalbi 'ala Layth*, *mahūsh bāsh yis'id m'āha*, 'silk and rags don't mix', that is why I am so worried about Layth, he will not be happy with her".

Layth is Ghāya's son. At the time I was conducting my field work, he became engaged to a provincial girl. On that occasion she disclosed her personal troubles and apprehension that history would repeat itself. The oral nature of the discourse allows this openness: Ghāya is in a good position to move in and out of the tale safely and easily.

'Aysha in 'the Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), is Ghāya's educated, intelligent and self-assertive woman who engages in overt confrontation, and competition with a man. A prince challenges his vizier with intrigues. He solves them with the help of his intelligent, learned daughter, 'Aysha. Defeated and seeing the intelligence of the girl, the prince takes her as a bride to suppress her and avenge himself. 'Aysha is shut up in a cave and subjected to a routine ritual questioning, but, to the prince's dismay, she always has an answer and stands up to him. The prince eventually acknowledges her merit and she resumes her rightful place in his household and rules with him.

Ghāya is educated and knowledgeable but she sees that her knowledge and abilities were wasted. She wanted to take a job, but social constraints

prevented her and she saw herself forced into marriage and confined to a traditional female role. Women's education and status is of interest to her.

We have brains just like them and we can use them. Why waste them? (Discussion of the tale).

In this tale, Ghāya explores a woman's world and comments on the painful dispute between the ingrained popular stereotype of a woman and her proper place in that society. Her heroines fight for recognition of female abilities and accomplishment; and seek power and a valued position in the family and society. 'Aysha is a woman who speaks and makes her voice heard. Power is inextricable from the use of voice. She presents the longings for fulfilment of an intelligent young woman in conservative Tunisian society, and advocates indirectly a re-thinking of sexual roles. In this respect the imaginative discourse allows her to transcend the confines of her prison.

Ghāya's women's identity is wider than sexual. In fact she is less preoccupied with sexuality than self-assertion and independence from the tedium and injustice of her feminine role in marriage. Ghāya's attitude towards love and sexuality is conservative. Both are explored within *ḥalāl*, legitimate marriage. Couples engage in sexual relations only after completing the marriage contract,

When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to sleep with the woman, after all she was legally his wife (tale R2).

They read the *fātiḥa* (the traditional religious marriage contract was drawn up by simply reading the Fātiḥa, the first verse of the

Qur'ān, aloud), and they spent three days and three nights in marital bliss (tale R7).

Their contract was drawn up and she spent the night with him (tale R13).

The only instance of illicit sex is justified on the grounds of a big age gap between the partners,

Bāba Turki was married to a very young and pretty woman. He could have been her father. She took a lover (tale R5).

Ghāya did not utter a single word of condemnation. She was slightly inhibited though. The first time she told me the joke, she used the colloquial word *ṣāhib*, 'lover/boyfriend'. But when I wanted to record it, she shifted to classical Arabic, *khalīl* 'close friend' to overcome her shyness and inhibition on the one hand and in deference to the tape recorder on the other.

To conclude, I would suggest that through her language and tales, Ghāya unveils truths about herself and her own life which become blended with the narrative reality in a process of cross-influence, expressed in her views about marriage and women's status. Abu-Lughod (1986) in her book *Veiled sentiments* came to the same conclusions. She studied *ghinnāwas*, the poetry of sentiment of a Bedouin society and concluded that poetry was used in certain contexts as a medium of expressing and commenting on personal life and experience.

Ghinnāwas can be considered poetry of personal life: individuals recite such poetry in specific context, for the most part private, articulating in it sentiments about their personal situations and closest relationships (Abu Lughod 1986: 31).

3.3.2. Sa'diyya

Sa'diyya is fifty five. She was born and brought up in Tunis. She comes from a fairly wealthy Beldi family. She also traced their roots in the city into the distant past and claimed descent from the Prophet. "Our family enjoys a special status because they were *shurafa*, 'descendents of the Prophet'. We have *sajārat al-Shurafa*, 'the genealogy chart of nobles'," (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/1990). Their ancestor migrated to Kairouan from the Arab Peninsula. He was a *sharīf* who lived a reputedly saintly, pious and virtuous life. He made water jugs for a living. Local tradition claims that one day, the *Shaykh* took out his jugs to dry in the sun, but suddenly clouds gathered in the sky announcing heavy rain. The *shaykh* prayed to God to spare his water jugs. It poured with rain but not a single drop fell on the jugs. When the *Shaykh* died a tomb was built in Kairouan and it became a popular shrine: *Sīdi al-qallāl*, drawing till the present date hundreds of pilgrims at religious festivals.

Sa'diyya's parents died when she was young. At the age of ten she was adopted and brought up by her uncle who had three children, a boy and two girls. Sa'diyya did not go to school as it was considered at that time disgraceful to send girls to school to be taught by foreign male teachers. "My uncle was too narrow-minded; many of our peers went to school but he wouldn't allow us to pursue any studies, so now I can't read or write. It is so painful I will never forgive him. There was an incident of a young Beldi girl who eloped with a French teacher. All the parents were scared

that this might happen to their own daughters" (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/1990). Sa'diyya was young when she came to live with her uncle, but she was very clever and shone at household tasks. She soon became her uncle's favourite and took pride of place in his household. She had the key to the provisions room. Her cousins were spoiled and never helped her with the domestic chores. In the early fifties, the family moved from the *Medīna* to settle in Rades, the second core residential area of the Beldi. Her cousins eventually married and moved out to settle with their husbands' families. At the age of sixteen, she fell in love with a schoolmaster related to her cousin's husband who returned her love. But her cousin wanted to arrange a marriage between him and her own daughter, so she used all possible means to impede the marriage. Sa'diyya used to meet him at her cousin's house in secret. When the romance was discovered she was forbidden to visit her cousin any more on the grounds that Sa'diyya was too frivolous and would have a bad influence on her two daughters. During four years the young lovers managed to meet occasionally in secret. "It was tragic; I cried my eyes out" (Interview 5/2/90). One day the cousin went to his father and announced that he wanted to marry Sa'diyya, but the father objected on the grounds that Sa'diyya was frivolous (her relationship with him was known to every one in the family), and that his first cousin was a more appropriate bride. The young man grew tired of it and left the country. Sa'diyya felt abandoned and betrayed and vowed never to marry. She turned down all the suitors and devoted herself to taking care of her sickly old uncle and his wife, hoping the man she loved would come back one day. Suddenly her uncle died. His wife followed forty days later. Sa'diyya continued to live in the same house with her cousin and his young bride. She took a job at a shoe factory which hired girls in the neighbourhood. Nobody objected. When the young couple moved to their new house a few kilometres away, Sa'diyya

had to give up her job as there was no means of transport at the time and the shoe factory was quite a walk away. She was treated so badly by her sister-in-law that when a seventy year old widower proposed, she accepted and moved out to live with him. He died three years later leaving her the house they were living in and his pension allowance to live on.

3.3.2.1. Her sources

Sa'diyya learnt her art from her uncle's wife who was a very talented story teller, and her own uncle who was an educated man who used to read them the *One Thousand and One Nights* in the nineteen forties. Sa'diyya's talent manifested itself very early. "It has been some years now since as a little girl I used to listen to tales from my uncle's wife and from *Alf layla we Layla*. " For her, listening to tales is a kind of compensation for her illiteracy: "It was on long winter nights that I waited impatiently for my uncle's wife to tell me and my cousins tall tales. I can't remember going through an apprenticeship. At the age of ten I was able to repeat the stories I heard the night before without omitting a single episode. My uncle used to say: 'She possesses a verbal facility, a captivating story telling manner, which reveal an extraordinary gift. If this girl had been to school she would have achieved wonders.' I think it was a gift from God'," (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/990).

From the analysis of the tales she selected emerge concerns of immediate relevance to her life. The tales she likes to tell are also loaded with themes inspired by personal experience. Sa'diyya's account of her life forces upon us an analogy between herself and her art. Two points stand out: the loss of both her parents at an early age and her adoption by her uncle, and her painful love story. In her favourite tales (S1, S2, S3, S8, S9, S23,

S27), sometimes hidden behind various characters, and sometimes explicitly, Sa'diyya enacts her own existential anxieties: her painful experience as an orphan but more so, her resentment and frustration at the injustice suffered through being thwarted in love. She assumes a personal time that she will revive and bring back through her narratives. She will draw inspiration from her own personal memories and past experiences to make her heroines evolve in a familiar universe, a universe she knows. In a sense, most stories arise not only from "the combination and re-combination of motifs, with which the individual is free to build", as Finnegan (1970: 387) claims, but also from a social and personal experience.

3.3.2.2. Her heroines

'Aysha the fisherman's daughter is an orphan mistreated and starved by her step-mother and relegated to the status of a maid, sweeping the floor, cleaning and cooking. During the telling Sa'diyya intervenes, speaking in her own voice: "From early morning till nightfall, 'Aysha would sweep the floor, do the washing and cooking; who cares? The loving mother is in the grave. She would cry her eyes out remembering her dead mother" (tale S9). Much of the story is idiosyncratic and has meaning for Sa'diyya in terms of her life story. Her personal experiences are clearly evident through the consciousness of 'Aysha. Her own life was a replica of her heroine's; cleaning, sweeping and cooking. In a strongly-felt aside, she tells how she did all this without any recognition, *lāna maḥmūdīn we lāna mashkūrīn*, 'We were neither thanked nor praised'.

In this tale, animals speak to reward 'Aysha for allowing them to quench their thirst, pearls stream from her mouth, and flowers spread all around

her, and yet despite the fantastic nature of the narrative, the heroine nevertheless takes up a real human dimension.

The love theme is predominant in her repertoire. Sa'diyya has chosen a literature of the body as well as the heart. Many tales feature great loves, separations and reunions, and display passions and yearnings, and overt sexuality and eroticism.

'The Salt Peddler' (tale S 21), relates the story of a young loving couple separated by the young man's parents. During the telling, Sa'diyya takes up space to put forward her own experience and view on men and the world : "They lived happily together until one day he went to his father and announced that he wanted to marry her. His father objected, on the grounds that he was promised to his cousin. Sa'diyya intervenes: *hādhi kif qiṣṣti, farrqūna yihlik wlād al-ḥrām*, 'this is like my story, they separated us damn the bastards.' The lovers were disappointed and decided to elope. They travelled overland until they were exhausted. They decided to stop for a while. She laid her head in his lap and fell sound asleep. When she awoke, she found a stone under her head for a pillow, and the prince was nowhere to be seen. "You see, one can never trust men. They are mere puppets in their father's hands", Sa'diyya comments. "Maybe we will have some justice in the world to come, but even there God seems to favour men. He promised them Ḥūris, 'beautiful angels', and there is no mention of male ḥūris for women'," she adds jokingly.

Sa'diyya's view is that it is a man's world and her bitterness at having been abandoned and betrayed and her anger and protest against social pressure very often filter through the stories.

After a while the merchant realised that his wife had disappeared. He looked for her, then gave up, *māw al-rjāl we al-zmān ma fihumsh amān*, 'as men and time are not to be trusted' (tale S1).

Sometimes the protest turns into a strong open social attack and insult: 'damn the bastards' (tale S21).

In the following tale, Sa'diyya also endorses the role of her heroine, who like herself was abandoned by her lover, and expresses her own resentment and frustration:

Hussayna walked until she came to a grave where her destined husband was buried, as the ogre had explained to her. She was to cry until she filled seven jars and seven drinking cups with her tears, which would break the spell on him. She sat down on a bench and started to cry and cry. She remembered her dead father and cried - her unhappy days and cried. She cried over her bad luck, her self-sacrifice until she filled the first, then the second and so on (S27).

On that night, the black bride prepared the coffee with a sleeping potion in it and served it to her husband so that he would be incapable of doing anything. To test its effect, she burned his heel but he did not react. Hussayna was then allowed to come up to his apartment. Seeing him unconscious, she tried to shake him awake, she beat him up, with all the anger and frustration of a betrayed and abandoned woman explaining: "I am the one who has loved you so dearly, I am the one who cried over you, I am the one who has

sacrificed her life, I am the one you should have married, but to no avail" (tale S 27).

The intensity of Sa'diyya's description of the wailing and lament of Hussayna and the manifestation of her emotional involvement left little doubt that her heroine's anguish echoed her own. This identification with her heroine provided a catharsis.

Different studies of tales have postulated psychological functions of various sorts. According to Fischer, one of them would be to express emotions which cannot be expressed directly. The folktale is "a vehicle for the expression of existing emotions which have for one or another reason been denied expression" (Fischer 1963: 257). Abu-Lughod in *Veiled Sentiments* noted a discrepancy between the sentiments generally expressed in the poetry of the intimate world of Awlād 'Ali and those expressed about the same situations in ordinary social interaction and discourse. She studied closely the poetry of Fāyga a young Bedouin woman whose poetry reflected her reactions to her arranged marriage to a cousin and described it as "a medium in which she could voice responses not culturally appropriate for a young Bedouin." As a Bedouin girl from a 'good family' who is expected to comply with the rules of sexual modesty and propriety, "she should not resist a marriage arranged by her brother" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 221). But her poetry suggested a deeply frustrated self that her ordinary behaviour and discourse failed to reveal. The tales quite similarly allowed Sa'diyya to express emotions which have been denied expression in her interactions with others in ordinary discourse. Because, if communicated in every-day discourse, these emotions would, as in the case of Fāyga, violate the canons of female modesty. Sexual modesty required that romantic love should not be expressed, but the tales afford a certain amount of protection to allow Sa'diyya to do so.

Love and sexuality are explored outside the boundaries of social conventions. In the performance she is very uninhibited and speaks freely about love, desire and passion. Of my informants, she is the only one who tells explicit sexual jokes without any inhibition. She depicts heroines who seek sexual fulfillment, who break social barriers and surrender to impulsive passions, i.e. Rdāḥ (tale S2), al-Ḥājja Mkāda in 'Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil' (tale S3), the qāḍi's mother in 'Overpowering Desire' (tale S28), the king's wife, in 'Lūlsha' (tale S1), but also the conservative who would preserve her family's honour, 'the Bird that Flew' (tale S11). Her heroines are on the whole passionate, rebellious and hungry for sexual love.

In the tale (S2) Rdāḥ falls in love with Ḥmid al-Hilāli and receives him in her apartment in spite of the strict surveillance set by her father and spends three nights with him. A strain of intense female sexual fantasy and eroticism runs through the description of Rdāḥ and al-Ḥājja Mkāda. The scene is a chamber with a voluptuous decor.

Rdāḥ, the fine lady, walked about her apartment furnished with silk curtains, wearing a fine see through nightgown, letting her hair hang loose down her back (tale S2).

Al-Ḥājja Mkāda took a quick musk bath and put on a fine silk night gown. As she walked about her apartment, the perfume of musk wafted all over the place. She sent Dāda downstairs to invite the man to join her in her sleeping chamber (tale S3).

The depiction of her heroines presents women strongly aware of their own needs, appetites and passions. Sexual adventure is a response to an ebullient, rousing desire:

Your father, may he rest in peace, used to travel extensively. One day a peddler came to the house, he was tall and handsome, and as soon as I set eyes on him, I was seized with burning passion and desire to lie with the man. I have sinned, may God forgive me, *nafsi khānitni*, 'I could not resist/gave in to my inner force' (tale S28).

The king's wife, as soon as she set eyes on the scribe, felt a burning desire for him. She sent him her maid, saying "Could you return the passion of one who burns for you?" He answered: "I would rather be damned than betray my Lord's trust" (tale S1).

The heroines express female sexual energy and desire. Sa'diyya speaks freely about it and enjoys her own fantasies. The tales talk of women's desires and women taking the initiative in making advances. In contrast the situation usually prevailing in Tunisian Arab society is one in which sexual initiative and power is essentially a masculine prerogative. The tales reveal a direct reversal of social roles as Davis has shown for festive behaviour in early modern France in her essay on women on top (Davis 1979: 210) . The performances give women the opportunity to overturn social conventions and the words to express sexual freedom which they cannot express in normal every-day discourse. There are strong social controls on the expression of such emotions.

3.3.3. Khīra

Khīra is sixty-two, born and brought up in Tunis. She comes from a large family of two boys and four girls, which enjoyed a position of respect in the city. She went to a convent school until the age of twelve from where she graduated with a *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires*. She went out wearing

al-Khāma al-miṣriyya 'a short black, head-shawl', which was customary at the time for girls, and accompanied by Ali, their black servant. She wanted to pursue her studies further but her father objected on the grounds that she was now grown-up and should think in terms of her future role as an accomplished housewife and therefore learn domestic tasks:

Al-ubbāt kānu yikhāfu 'ala shrafhum al-tufla idha balghit tuq'ud fi al-dār, 'out of concern for the family's honour parents confine their daughters to the house as soon they reach puberty' (Interview 15/03/1989). At the age of nineteen she became engaged to her first cousin, but three years later the two families split over the question of inheritance and the engagement was eventually broken off. Her sisters and one of her brothers got married and moved out of the house, but she turned down all suitors because she did not feel they were suitable. "I preferred spinsterhood to accepting marriage to the firstcomer; I suppose God willed it so for me" (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/90).

Khīra developed a close friendship with a girl of her own age, living next door. "We were like sisters, we went to school together, then *dār al-M'allma*, (traditional institution where girls were sent to learn sewing, embroidery and the like). I was her confidante throughout a misfortune which I suppose was ordained by God. She was seduced and abandoned by

her brother-in-law. But God sent her an angel who married her and saved her honour. Where can one find such loyalty nowadays?"

Khīra lived with her parents and younger brother in their ancestral house. Her brother eventually got married and his bride came to live with him. When both her parents died, her brothers decided to sell the house and give each one his share of the inheritance. Her younger brother bought a house in Le Bardo, to the west of Tunis, and she moved to live there with him and his family, where she still is today.

She went on her first pilgrimage when she was thirty-five and on her return, to the dismay of her brothers and sisters, she decided to give up the idea of marriage, lead a pious life and devote her life to God and his Prophet. She has been on pilgrimage to Mecca four times and hopes to live to complete the cycle of seven pilgrimages aspired to by pious Muslims 'if God wills'. When I first met Khīra she was wearing the Muslim headscarf which she decided to wear, she explained, when she first went on pilgrimage. She gave me the following explanation, "*al-ḥajj*, 'pilgrimage', is not a game; we are supposed to give up all life's pleasures and lead a strict and pious life" (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/90). Khīra is indeed strict, and is reputed to be extreme in her observance.

3.3.3.1. Her sources

Khīra learnt her art from her grand-mother and from her grand-father who, after an elementary education, appears to have devoted himself to studying the Qur'ān. In addition to his thorough religious knowledge he had an intimate acquaintance with the whole range of *Ḥadīth*, 'the Prophet's oral traditions', and Arabic historic legends, '*Antar*, *al-Amīra dhāt al-Himma* and *Sayf Ibn dhi Yazan*. In the nineteen-forties, he used

to attend male story-telling events taking place at the local coffee house. At that time the Rāwi was Shādli Nafāti.

In her early childhood years, they used to be visited by her great aunt who was a professional cook and a very talented story-teller. Another formative factor was telling tales to peer groups. Khīra was able to tell stories to her peers at the age of thirteen. "I started telling stories to my cousins and insisted on being paid out of their pocket money. Later when my gift was acknowledged, I was in great demand to tell stories at all family gatherings and rejoicings; I knew all the *twāshi*, 'formulae', and recited a lot of poetry from memory in my narration. I even invented a closing formula: *ḥkāyitna hakka hakka , we al-‘ām al-jāy nimshīuw li bayt Makka*, 'our story has come to an end, may we go to Mecca next year'," (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/90). Khīra's stories, like everything else in her life, revolve around religion.

From the analysis of the tales Khīra selected emerge themes and topics she seems particularly concerned with. In her life story two points stand out: on the one hand the great importance she attaches to religion, particularly the Muslim idea that all things are subject to predestination, and on the other nostalgia for 'the good old times' and her regret for the changes that Tunisian society has undergone, the deterioration in human relations under the banner of individualism and the change in women's position in the name of modernism. Khīra told me six stories altogether, all of which exhibit the same messages and concerns.

3.3.3.2. Her heroines

The idea that all things large and small are subject to predestination and God's will is predominant in her stories. Four out of six (tale K1, 2, 5, 6) deal with the amazing interventions of fate in human lives and the futility

of any human attempt to escape it. As a religious person, Khīra is primarily a fatalist who seeks explanation from the perspective of fate and providence. She believes that whatever good fortune or misfortune human life contains, its major and minor events are conceived as predestined. Just like her characters, Khīra submits to God's will as a way to accept her present condition.

Her heroines are loyal and affectionate (tale K1, K2) and fight for human justice (tale K4).

Khīra's favourite tale is *al-'ishra*, 'Companionship' (tale K2). The heroine is predestined to a misfortune which she overcomes with the help of a young girl who offers her affection and support until it is over. In this story, she draws inspiration from her own experience and her relationship with her neighbour. The story is frequently interspersed with Khīra's own nostalgic comments on the 'good old days' and the regrettable changes in human relations. In the tale the bond which was created between the two girls is called *al-'ishra*, and was based on affection, devotion and loyalty.

Al-'ishra is from the root *'āshara*, meaning 'to live with'; the term is used to express the bond of non-kin living together and applies for instance to neighbours and *'ashīra*, 'community'. The story was elicited during a conversation about how sentiment and loyalty could sometimes bring people closer than flesh and blood. In a strongly felt aside, Khīra makes the following comment: "In my generation the relationship that existed between neighbours based on *mā we milh*, 'water and salt', was similar to that which related brothers and sisters, maternal and paternal cousins; our neighbours used to visit us, and assist us in sickness and in health, in weddings and in mournings, we shared *mā we milh* 'water and salt' (meaning food). Nowadays neither the one nor the other matters any more. No one cares any more about any one else except his *nfayyistu*, 'little self'. Khīra regrets that the links that united individuals in a cohesive

social structure are broken. According to her, *al-Baldiyya kunna 'āyla waḥda, lḥamm we damm we 'ishra, al-islām waṣṣa 'ala al-damm wil jār waṣṣa 'alīh al-Nabi ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi we sallam*, 'the Beldi composed one family, flesh, blood and *al-'ishra* united us; Islam recommends that Muslims should value blood relationship and Mohamed, peace be upon him, recommends that Muslims should love neighbours and treat them as kin' (Discussion of the tale 10/3/90).

She faithfully and nostalgically idealizes a past when the tenets and practices of Islam appear to have provided absolute harmony in the lives and affairs of women. A girl was supposed to possess reserve, decency, *al-ḥaya*, and show respect for her elders. *Il-banat kānu yiḥshmu we yaḥiyāu we yiqaddru al-kbār we ṣwāṭhum ma titsma'sh, mush kīma bnāt tawwa il-qbāḥa wil-fṣāṣa* 'girls used to be modest, decent and considerate of their elders; their voices were not to be heard, not like girls nowadays who are arrogant and callous' (tale K2). Khīra is convinced that her community used to exemplify the real values of Islam particularly in regard to the modesty of women and the respect of the young for their elders. The cultural horizons have changed. "Modernity has altered the traditional roles. Young girls are now influenced by alternative cultural ideals and practices" (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/1990).

In her opinion, *al-mrā qdarha fi rājilha, dārha we sifsārīha illi yaḥmīha min 'aynayn wlād al-ḥarām*, 'a woman's dignity is enshrined in her marriage, home and the veil which shields her from the disrespectful gaze of bastards'.

In the West the veil is often taken as a symbol of oppression for women, but Khīra considers it a protection for a woman's dignity. *al-Hijāb 'aṭa qdar we karāma lil-mrā we mahūsh ḥabs kīma yqūlu fi al-gharb, al-rasūl qāl inna mina al-ḥaya waqār* 'the veiling of women in Islam is intended to protect them and enhance their dignity and not to imprison

them as they say in Europe, the Prophet said modesty leads to solemnity' (Khīra, Interview, 15/3/1990).

Even though she refused to marry, in Khīra's opinion marriage provides protection and sexual fulfillment for women. On the occasion of the marriage of her heroine she makes the following comment, *al-rājil binnisba li al-mrā kif al-ghṭa li al-ṭanjra*, 'a husband is for a woman what a lid is for a cooking pot' (tale K3). The expression is commonly used in Tunis to refer to husband and wife and more specifically in the case of women to emphasize the importance of marriage in their lives.

All her heroines are married and happy. Loyalty figures strongly in their universe as 'the Clever Peasant Girl' (tale K4) exemplifies. A woman is divorced by her husband, a qāḍi because she intervenes to redress a wrong he perpetrated and disgraces him before litigants. She is given three days to leave the house and take with her 'whatever she valued most'. The woman gives the husband a sleeping potion and carries him in a wooden case to her father's home in the country. He wakes up in the morning to find himself in the country:

He asked, "What brought me here?" She replied, "You told me to leave and take with me whatever I valued most. I thought, gold and silk are earthly possessions. What else do I have dearer than you? So I brought you with me" (tale K4).

Another example of loyalty is found in 'You Who Rebel Against Your Fate, Rise and Face what God has Ordained' (tale K1). Khīra celebrates the love and loyalty which bind the couple. On hearing about her predestined misfortune which consists of becoming a beggar, a singer and a prostitute each for a year, the heroine takes her own life to avoid

disgracing her beloved husband: "I would rather die than disgrace my beloved husband" (tale K1).

Khīra' s ideas take on a nostalgic cast. Her view glorifies what she considered a basic form of social organisation and salutary way of life based on respect, loyalty and trust that she saw passing with Tunisia's modernisation.

The attitudes and comments of Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khīra which are interpolated in the tales are complementary. As explained above, Sa'diyya takes a liberal view of sexual mores and women's status, whereas Khīra has a more traditional and conservative view on these matters. For instance she believes that men and women's roles should be strictly differentiated and that women of her generation were more respected and had a better position. For her part Ghāya, while reinforcing traditional values in some respects, such as those of sexual modesty and patience, promotes the notion that women should be able to exercise their intellects in affairs outside the home.

Telling tales is not so much recounting past events, as a reflection of present cultural values. In his research in the Hilālī tradition in Libya and Jordan, Ayoub (1984) reported two instances of this phenomenon. He shows how the Libyan and Palestinian story-teller re-tells the Hilālī Epic in terms of present culture and how each uses the past to protest against the present through his 'double articulation du message.' In the act of narration past memories are brought back to life. The narrators Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khīra re-create also the past for present purposes. Their tales, despite their imaginative dimension offer them a platform to shift from the imaginative to the actual and express their personal trauma and

divergent attitudes and comment upon and criticize their culture, adding a political dimension to the tales.

3.4. Female voice in the tale: the alternative discourse

In Greek tradition, women weave and use the woven object, be it tapestry or robe, as a metaphor for narrating the truth.

The Greek myth of Philomela is one of several which connects the speech of women with weaving and may serve as a paradigm of the narrative power of the female. I shall review the story in an attempt to draw an analogy between Philomela and her tapestry on the one hand, and the narrators and their art on the other.

Pandion married Zeuxippe, the sister of his mother, and by her had two daughters, Procne and Philomela, and twin sons, Erchtheus and Butes. When war broke out with Labdacus over land boundaries, Pandion summoned Tereus, the son of Area, from Thrace as an ally. After winning the war with his help he gave Tereus to his daughter Procne to marry. Tereus had a son, Itys, by her. Tereus fell in love with Philomela and seduced her, saying that Procne, whom he had hidden in the country, was dead. Afterwards he married Philomela and went to bed with her. He also cut out her tongue. By weaving letters in a robe, Philomela spelled out to Procne the terrible things that had been done to her. After she sought her sister, Procne killed her son Itys, boiled him and served him to Tereus without his knowledge. When Tereus learned what had happened, he seized an axe and pursued them. They were caught at Daulia in Phocis and prayed to the Gods to be turned into birds. Procne became a

nightingale and Philomela a swallow. Tereus, too, was turned into a bird, becoming a hoopoe (Weigle 1987: 182).

Philomela's story illustrates two points : first the inability to speak and second the representation of the truth through an alternative medium: art. Deprived of her tongue Philomela speaks through another medium, the tapestry, to make the unspeakable speak. The narrators of these tales resemble Philomela. The semantic link between tale telling and yarn spinning is established in the classical story and in Tunisian colloquial Arabic the verb *ḥakā* means to tell tales, to fantasize. But in its extended meaning it means spin, weave. The context within which stories are sometimes told reinforces the association. Sa'diyya reports that domestic crafts, i.e. lace-making and embroidery, were sometimes accompanied by the spinning of tales.

The narrators and women of their generation grew up in a conservative Tunisian milieu where women were silent as part of their basic identity. Women, silenced though they may be, tell tales that become their voice, giving a platform for tensions and frustrations, allowing them to utter the unutterable, to express what is otherwise not permissible. I have demonstrated above that the tales that the narrators like to tell are doorways, through which certain truths about genuine social experience are admitted into discourse. Sa'diyya explained, *Hmūm al-dunya yāklūna lukān ma nfarhdūsh 'ala ḥwālna bi l-ḥkāyāt*, 'the chagrins of life would prey too severely if we did not entertain ourselves with tales' (Sa'diyya, Interview, 5/2/1990). Reality is depicted as hard and weary for most women; fantasy is common in their stories as a compensation and an escape from a reality which is too much to bear. Women were confined but not in their imagination. In addition to their didactic function, tales serve as a

vehicle for personal frustrations and aspirations and can therefore be seen as a search for a resolution to personal problems.

In Tunisia tale-telling is predominantly a female art as I have indicated. The male world is not of these kinds of imaginative tales, but is one in which historical legends are related by professional story-tellers. In the area where I was doing my fieldwork, a male story telling tradition was entirely quiescent while female tradition was still strong. The tales I have collected are assumed to have their origins in a female domain, and many informants testify to the perceived position of female story tellers. When I approached men, they directed me to women, and the narrators Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khīra claim to have heard their stories mainly from other women . The fact that women monopolize this imaginative art form is significant.

Male story-tellers inhabit a male public world. In public spheres, *Rāwis* told legends to strictly male audiences and behind closed doors women told stories to other women who understand their anxieties and share them. To the extent that men and women have different concerns, it is likely they would draw on different forms of expressive art.

Overall a picture emerges of women who experience both economic and intellectual forms of subordination. Largely barred from access to the public spheres, they were confined to the house to fulfil traditional roles, and excluded from any public discourse. The limitations that circumscribed women's lives were nowhere more apparent than in this area of speech. Men monopolized the official public discourse. Women could 'speak' through stories, but compared to the male genres, their stories are dismissed as *khrāf* , 'nonsense' or *hkāyāt 'ajāyiz*, 'old women's tales'.

In my fieldwork I found that men, while quite happy to tell me for instance 'The Hilāli epic', a historic legend, elaborately structured and heroic in subject matter, concerning events which were believed to have actually taken place, always referred me to women for fictional tales. The designation has major implications for our understanding of this genre, for it clearly indicates that society considers the telling of these tales a woman's art form. The term *yikharrif* is commonly used to refer to a talk without substance; unimportant and insignificant. And to the extent that they are 'old women's tales', folktales are perceived by men as being silly, and their telling an activity fit only for women. The fabulous element in folktales lends them an air of improbability and unreality. Men's legends describe events that are thought to have happened, and so are supposedly more serious in content. Women are shown to be marginalised by men. In all cases the forces of repression and marginalisation are male or represent the establishment. The marginalisation of the women was therefore carried over to their tales; their voice is ignored. I show here that female tales carry important messages and that narration is an exercise of power of sorts. Ghazoul's (1980) approach, in her thesis, is to examine narration as power, in terms of the gender opposition. She looks at the position of women as narrators and considers Shahrazād's act of narration as an appropriation and inversion of power; the discourse of the night involves an inversion which is the only solution for Shahrazād to gain power and save her neck. The power of the word, in a domain not constrained by the presence of men compensates for women's powerlessness in public life, and becomes a substitute for the real power they are denied.

3.5. Concluding remarks

Following the world of the Beldi female narrators, Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khīra, we can trace the act of narration as empowerment for the powerless and view the tale as an alternative multi-voiced discourse that embodies the personal - a doorway for expressing personal trauma, frustrations and aspirations - and the socio-political as direct social commentaries. *Contes de fées et contes de faits* - 'tales of fables and facts'- succinctly captures the duality of the imaginary and the real, in the real lives of the narrators who present these tales.

CHAPTER FOUR: WOMAN AND POWER

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will concentrate on what the Beldi women's tales reveal about the cultural image of themselves in relation to power and authority. The approach entails two elements. I shall first centre the analysis around the political aspects of Beldi family life especially the distribution of power within the family in order to learn which aspects are in the hands of men and which are in the hands of women. Second, I shall analyze the strategies women employ in attaining ends and circumventing the dominant patterns of domestic power.

In the hierarchy of power and authority underlying the tales collected, God stands at the apex, followed by the Prophet Mohamed, next comes the king and men and then women.

4.2. Man the patriarch

Men and women have different spheres of actions: the public domain is man's arena whereas women are confined to the domestic domain and entrusted with the care and welfare of the household. The public/private dichotomy relates to a widespread sociological distinction recounted by Rosaldo (1974). Typically, men control the 'public domain' where 'universalist' interests are expressed and managed, and women are located in or confined to the 'domestic domain' charged with the welfare of their own families.

The hierarchy of authority within the household is clearly ordered by males. A man rules over his household, he is the provider, the master and the guide, (tale R1; 3, 10, 13, 16; S1, 3, 5, 9, 11, 25, 26, 27; K1, 4,5). Husbands are described in the tales as having to provide their wives and children with all the necessities of life; food and clothing. One example is the tale 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli' (tale R13), where a young bride is described as being presented every day with large bags full of provisions for the meals of the day; meat, vegetables and fruit, from her husband. It is he who has to pay for the "lovely, silk and gold, expensively-embroidered caftan" as evidence of his love.

Another example, is in the tales 'Ḥabb al-Gtār' (tale K3), and 'The Dog with the Seven Chains' (tale R16), where a father, before going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, provides his wife and seven daughters with provisions for a full year, and asks each of them what their most cherished thing is, so that he might fulfill their wishes.

Typically a poor young man cannot afford to marry and start a family. In one tale 'Walha and 'Aysha' (tale S5), a young man is refused his cousin when he asks for her hand, because he has no money to provide for her. So he takes to the road to make his fortune and comes back to take her as a wife. In another tale, 'Fate' (tale K5), a young rural peasant emigrates to Tunis, the city, to find a job and support his family. This responsibility is the basis for the tight economic and political monopoly of male family members, and male control over women in general.

Man, the provider, is also in most cases the master and the guide in his household. His relationship with his wife, and in the case of extended residence, with the various members of the family, is marked by

subordination. Husbands exercise power over their wives and their orders are obeyed. In the tale 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli' (tale R13), a man rules over his household. On hearing about her mother's illness, his young wife seeks his permission to go and pay her a visit. She is ordered not to stay long and come back before sunset.

In the tale 'the Basil' (tale S10), a man locks his wife up in a cellar, refusing her food and drink as a punishment for her arrogance.

In 'Šābra' (tale R1), a man orders his wife to find him a bride and make all the arrangements for his wedding, which she does in a spirit of resignation.

Women are not supposed to be heads of households, except in the absence of a male head, in most cases dead. The following example illustrates this point. In 'the Virtuous' (tale R 3), a young woman loses both her parents and is left with a young brother to look after. She soon takes over the responsibility of the household and her brother's education until he is able to go out and work and resume his role at home as head of the household. The category of women heads of household consists for the most part of widows and divorcees. In many examples, the status of women as widows or divorcees enables them to go out and make a living for themselves and their families, mainly through female trades such as spinning wool, and thereby assume responsible roles. These circumstances give mothers de facto control over their children and make them wielders of considerable power. They are the ultimate decision-makers about their children's futures and welfare (tales R11, R13; S4, S27, S30).

The Beldi patriarchy is an instance of what Kandiyoti calls 'classic patriarchy': "the key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the

operations of patrilocally extended household....which gives the senior man authority over anyone else, including younger men" (Kandiyoti 1988: 278).

The implications of classic patriarchy for women also entail forms of control and subordination. Under the system girls are married off without their consent. One example, is in the tale 'Walha and 'Aysha' (tale S5), where a father marries his young daughter to a Jew, a union which is prohibited by Islam, to satisfy his own greed for money.

Girls are given in marriage into households headed by their husband's fathers. There they are subordinate not only to all men but also to their mother-in-law (tale R4; S22, S23).

On the basis of the discussion of evidence from the tales, the hierarchy of authority is clearly ordered and dominated by a male, the dominant personality of an authoritarian and patriarchal system.

4.3. Woman's status

How do women operate within this framework? Does the system as it stands provide scope for women to play any part other than complete subservience? What are their strategies and coping mechanisms?

On the basis of the tales, we will see that in general, a woman is subject to the authority of a father or a husband, but in some circumstances she can wield authority over other women.

On the manifest level of the tales, all women are submissive towards men, be it a father or a husband, but, in their relationships among themselves,

some women have significantly more power than others over other women, for instance as wives and mothers-in-law, as will be demonstrated.

Women, no matter where they stand in the tales, are defined in terms of their relationship to a man, as his daughter, his sister, wife or mother. While men are not defined in terms of their position vis-a-vis women, they are defined, in the wording of Ortner, in terms of 'status and role categories', i.e. *qāḍi*, master craftsman, elderly, "that have little to do with men's relations to women" (Ortner and White-head 1981: 8). The female relational categories, 'wife', 'sister', 'mother' and 'daughter' dominate the concept of woman.

Contemporary anthropology substantiates the view that kinship and marriage organisation gives insight into the way in which cultures construe conceptions of womanhood and manhood. In her introduction to "the cultural construction of gender and sexuality", Ortner describes the spheres of life that shape cultural notions of gender and presents kinship and marriage as the most important context within which gender ideology is produced, because kinship and marriage are always 'about' gender, requiring two varieties of persons, 'male' and 'female' (Ortner and White-head 1981: 12). The Weberian (1958) perspective of actors within the social system describes individuals with greater or lesser degrees of power acting in different contexts and according to their different identities. Within the existing system of socially dominant actors, the degree of power held by women in relation to one another varies greatly according to status, age and seniority. The most significant female categories are daughters, sisters wives, and mothers. I shall now consider

each category of women and discuss their status with relation to the allocation of power and authority.

4.3.1. Daughters

Daughters is the most numerous category of female figures and represents the most submissive group of women. In the tales a daughter's fate is dependent on her father who exerts authority over her and her life. In many cases (tale R1, 2, 7, 13, 16; S5, 10, 11, 21, 23, 27, 30), daughters are married off without consultation or consent.

'Aysha (tale S30), is married off without her consent to a young man who turned out to be an ogre.

In 'Ḥabb al-Gtār' (tale K3), 'Aysha is taken to be slaughtered allegedly on her father's orders, which she does not question.

Each example portrays the submission of the daughters to the will of their fathers. There are two exceptions to this, 'Rdāḥ' (tale S2), and six of the seven daughters in 'the Dog with the Seven Chains' (tale R16).

Rdāḥ (summary S2))

A king was blessed after several years of barrenness with a beautiful daughter he named Rdāḥ. Rdāḥ's marriage to her paternal cousin was arranged by her father when she was very young. Her beauty was exceptional. The news travelled to Ḥmid al-Hilālī, an Arab bedouin from the tribe of Beni Hilāl, and he came to court her. He soon won her heart, and sent servants to kidnap her with

her consent. But Rdāḥ, being used to a life of ease and great luxury at her palace could not bear the hardship of peasant life, fell ill and died.

Expected to obey her parents and to marry a man acceptable to them, she breaks with the tradition and marries a stranger:

Now Dāda came to see her mistress, scolding her for her ingratitude, saying "My lord has spoilt and pampered you in a glass palace, away from prying eyes, and you pay him back by choosing an uncouth Bedouin peasant.

She later pays for the violation, "as God's wrath falls on her", and she dies of fever and grief, Sa'diyya concludes (tale S2).

The theme of obedience to parents in choosing a husband, usually a cousin, is linked to one of the features of Arab society, characterized by clan or family ties. Endogamous marriages are seen as preferable to exogamous marriages because they protect the family property from dispersal and maintain its power. Unions are often formed between first cousins, in order to ensure the purity of line, on the one hand, and the retention of family property on the other. Such marriages were very common in traditional Tunisian society, and even up to now to a lesser degree, and there is even a common belief, that a cousin was entitled to kidnap his paternal cousin from her "bridal chair", if she married outside the family line. Rdāḥ, who violates the order, is described by Sa'diyya as disobedient in this respect, and her union is bound to fail, as it has not been crowned with her parents' benediction.

The Dog with the Seven Chains (summary R16).

Once upon a time there was an elderly man who decided to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He provided his seven daughters with provisions for a full year, and instructed them to keep their door shut and to forbid access to any stranger while he was away. The news travelled to the ogre, who disguised himself in the clothes of an elderly woman and came to visit the seven daughters disguised as their aunt. All the girls were taken in by her sweet words, except 'Aysha, the youngest, who reminded them of their father's instructions not to open the door. They eventually let the ogre in, and he devoured all of them one by one except 'Aysha, who was nowhere to be found.

Again disobedience to moral authority in the person of a father is heavily condemned. All the girls, except the youngest, perish. The two tales reinforce mainstream moral values.

4.3.2. Sisters

Common to the examples discussed above, is the portrayal of daughters as powerless. Indeed, daughters, given their position in the hierarchy of power within a patriarchal household, have practically no rights, and are entirely subject to the will of their fathers. Their relationship among themselves is also marked by subordination. The eldest sister has higher status and control over the younger ones. The eldest is, for instance, considered first for marriage. Suitors ask for the hand of the eldest first, regardless of whether she is the most beautiful or the most amenable. In

'Al-Maktūb' (tale S27), 'a Happy Home' (tale S30), 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli' (tale R13), the eldest daughters are married first, then the younger ones take their turn.

In 'Walha and 'Aysha' (tale S5), 'Aysha is married off without her consent to a Jew instead of her cousin, because he is not able to pay her bridal price. 'Aysha, after a few years grows fond of her husband. In the meantime, her cousin goes abroad to accumulate a fortune. When he comes back, 'Aysha refuses to let her husband down and marry her cousin, who came to claim her back. Her sister Walha, helps him to win her back, and punishes her for indulging in drinking and leading a sinful life living with a Jew.

In this tale, the eldest sister, by virtue of her maturity and her particular care in observing Muslim tradition, plays the role of the guardian of tradition, and clearly enjoys a higher status which confers on her the power to penalize her sister and bring her back to the right track.

4.3.3. Changes in woman's status

A girl is given away in marriage into a household headed by her husband's father and senior female kinsfolk. In most cases, as will be demonstrated in this section, the transition from one status into another brings prestige and a degree of power.

4.3.3.1. Wives

In the tale 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli' (tale R13), the daughter of a wool spinner is married to a wealthy merchant and moves from her parents' house to that

of her husband. Her husband is the master. But she is described as a leisured wife with servants, leading an easy and comfortable life, giving instructions and recommendations, and presiding at the table and over the household. This causes jealousy among her unmarried sisters, who try to break up her marriage, to no avail.

In this tale, a girl appears in the transitional period between her status as daughter and her next status as wife. Once she is married, her status changes considerably. In her behaviour towards her husband, she accepts her dependence with resignation, but in comparison to her sisters, and in the absence of a mother in law, in this case dead, a certain degree of authority belongs to her, as she is entrusted with the house and the responsibility of maintaining the customary way of life. Ghāya described her situation as "ideal", since she has *la ḥmā wa la ḥimma*, 'no mother-in-law and no burden'. In normal circumstances, the mother-in-law would take up the role of presiding over her son's household and exerting control over his wife, as I will demonstrate in the discussion of the role of the mother-in-law.

The discussion of the previous tale presents evidence indicating that the status of a wife confers on a woman a superior position to that of a daughter. She may remain subordinated to her husband, as in the case above, but she does have a certain realm in which to exercise authority.

4.3.3.2. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law

In 'classic patriarchy', subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women and men (Kandiyoti 1988: 278).

The Wicked Mother-in-law (summary S23)

A young man is married off by his mother to a *bint 'āyla Beldiyya* 'daughter of a Beldi family'. Soon after she is married, the young bride is subjected to confinement within the house and bullied by her mother-in-law, who rules over her son's household like "an iron-fisted whirlwind". As she was a *bint 'āyla*, she never complains, but grows thinner every day. The son is aware of the mistreatment inflicted upon his wife, who is treated like a maid and deliberately starved, but cannot confront his mother as it would be unheard of to do so. He manages once to bring his wife some fruits and nuts, which does not pass unnoticed by his mother who humiliates him and accuses him of being "henpecked". The son turns to a ruse, to put an end to the situation. He consults an elderly man who advises him to feign anger at his wife's supposedly bad behaviour and repudiate her, which he does. The elderly man is a master craftman of the *Shashiyya*, and he employs many apprentices. One of them is a little effeminate, so the *Shashiyya* maker suggested he would dress him in women's clothes and send him to pose as the young merchant's supposed new bride, whom this time he had chosen. The new bride proves so impolite and so arrogant in behaviour, on the elderly man's instructions, that the mother begs her son to divorce her and bring his previous wife back, promising that she would love her and treat her like her own daughter.

In this tale the mother-in-law is all-powerful. Both her son and his wife are under her control. The mother-in-law's authority is expressed through the fact that she is the one who has the key to the storeroom and who decides the menu of the day. Both her own daughter and daughter-in-law are called upon to assist her. Once the food is ready, she distributes according to her own set of priorities; the men of the house first, then herself and her daughter, and the daughter-in-law is presented with the

leftovers. She goes even further in the exercise of her power and tries to break the intimate bond of the couple. The young husband's loving gesture is suppressed by the mother and she accuses him of being henpecked. In her article on "Patriarchy", Kandiyoti discusses the position of mothers within patriarchal system and their relationship to their sons. She contends that sons represent a women's most critical resource, her only means of access to power and security in old age. It is therefore understandable that they should strive to secure their sons' loyalty sometimes at the expense of their wives.

Sons' loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim their sons' primary allegiance (Kandiyoti 1988: 279).

Along the same lines, Mernissi (1983) presents the mother-in-law as "the greatest obstacle to conjugal intimacy" (Mernissi 1983:121).

The daughter-in-law's submission is expressed through the kissing of the hand and calling her mother-in-law: *lilla*, 'mistress'. She experiences hardship and deprivation but never once rebels or shows disrespect, as she is required by social convention to show deference and respect towards the mother-in-law: she is the daughter of an honourable Beldi family. Beldi customs prevented her from speaking out. Under the code of honour and shame as described in chapter six, a girl is required to keep silent, and show respect and deference towards senior women, particularly her mother-in-law. Any violation of the norm would

constitute grounds for a divorce, as the mother-in-law is in a position to influence a divorce.

The mother-in-law has the ultimate decision in her son's marriage. She is the one who chooses his wife, and if the bride proves insubordinate, she can influence him to divorce her, as the following example will further demonstrate.

A Happy Home (summary S30)

A young man is married off by his mother to a young girl. The young woman proves spoilt and lazy. She would sit all day long, idly chewing and watching the other women of the house doing the domestic chores and would not offer any assistance. The mother-in-law is openly very dissatisfied. She would sit every evening in the presence of her son, delighting in her daughter-in-law's laziness and celebrating her lack of domestic prowess: "she is useless, she can't build a happy home. She is good for nothing", until her son finally decides to divorce her.

The tale presents a mother-in-law's manipulating power and influence within her family, deciding on a marriage first, then influencing a divorce. The strategy used is indirect: she criticizes the young bride because she fails to fulfill the role of an accomplished wife which is an important condition for a successful and lasting marriage. The son could only give in to his mother's indirect demand to divorce his wife.

All the examples cited above clearly show that mothers-in-law exert considerable influence within their families, and sons and daughters are

required by social norms to show them deference and respect. In contrast, men have their own world outside in the coffeehouses, market and public life. All the men depicted have their own outside world. But inside the house, it is the mothers-in-law who enjoy great authority over the household and its inhabitants, which is very much their own domain. They may remain subservient to their husbands but their authority over their own domain is often as despotic as the men's and they will exercise every means of pressure at their disposal to further their aims and fulfill their needs. Many writers on traditional Arab Muslim societies (e.g. Lacoste-Dujardin 1985, Mernissi 1983), emphasize the power and authority that women gain when their sons become adults and marry. Kandiyoti describes it as follows:

A woman's life cycle in the patriarchal extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control she will have over her own subservient daughter-in-law (Kandiyoti 1988: 279).

In Tunisia the power of the mother-in-law is still acknowledged and many girls wish to marry young men with their mothers 'dead and buried'. *Ya'ṭik rājil maqdūd wa ḥma taḥt al-lhūd*, 'may you find a good catch with his mother tucked up in the grave', is a common phrase chanted at many puberty rituals by the mistress of ceremonies. Likewise many popular female songs show the dislike of young women for their mothers-in-law, such as the following:

Illummu illummu , nḥibbuh we mā nḥibbish ummuh

Illummu I love him but I don't love his mother

Sometimes the dislike turns to an open insult:

dakhaltuh li-kūjīna

we 'aṭīṭuh būsa bnīna

we 'afast 'ala dīn ummuh

I took him to the kitchen and kissed him and may his mother go to hell!

The above discussion using evidence from tales is centered upon the distribution of power and authority within the family. In Beldi society as portrayed in tales (R1, 13; S10, S 21, K2, K4), social organization is centered on a traditional patriarchal family, the microcosm of the social order where all tales come together. Within this social order there is scope for women to exercise a degree of overt power at an older age and in particular circumstances.

4.4. The power of the weak

Since women are not often in a position of authority, they resort to certain alternatives to obtain and wield power. I now intend to discuss the strategies women employ to attain certain ends, circumventing the domestic power structure.

There is a popular perception within Tunisian culture of women being passive, naive and submissive on the one hand, and active, cunning and manipulative on the other, manoeuvring in the domestic sphere with informal power and authority. On the basis of the tales I shall analyze these two opposing poles which emerge from the evidence, and discuss the different strategies employed by women in attaining their ends.

It is a tradition in Tunisia for the bride to be advised by her mother or female kin to step straight away on her new husband's foot on the wedding day, to show that she will have the upper hand in the marriage. This tradition sets the tone, the imbalance, right from the beginning. The tradition of stepping on the foot is anecdotal but indicative. It suggests that a woman should be more powerful than a man, and that she should actively take control in one way or another. Tales of women's superiority are often recounted among women as we will see from the discussion of some tales in the following section.

According to Weber's classic definition, power is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber 1958: 38). According to Weber's definition, you have power when you fill the role which enables you to force people to do what you want even when they don't want to. You also have power when people do what you want without even thinking whether they want to or not. Power in the current context must be used in two distinctive ways. First there is the direct power which is exercised by the male of the family in most contexts, but also by the female in exceptional circumstances, i.e. the status-related power which I discussed in the above section, the power a woman accumulates through the different roles she fulfills in the family, i.e. wife and mother-in-law and in the absence of a male head of household. Thus both men and women share direct control potentials. Second, in addition to the direct status-related control a woman exercises, she has the power derived from being powerless, referred to by Turner as "the power of the weak". Two kinds of female power are therefore at issue: the overt and the covert.

Turner (1969), speaks about "the power of the weak" in an analysis focussing primarily on ritual reversal of social roles. I intend to use it differently, referring to the potentiality/ ability of a person in a weak position to use indirect means to exert control where she/he cannot exert it directly.

I indicated above that there are two opposing archetypes of woman, the submissive passive and the active cunning, the latter displaying the 'power of the weak'. I will now examine the active cunning woman within the tales collected. Two tales will be considered more closely, the first of which is a further example of the submissive.

Şābra (summary R1)

A rich silk merchant gives his daughter Şābra in marriage to a rich suitor who is able to satisfy the father's requirements of three loads of gold as a bride price; one for her exceptional beauty, one for her wisdom and the third load for her patience. After two years of happy marriage, Şābra gives birth to a male child who is welcomed with joy and rejoicing. But soon the husband takes the child and throws it into the depths of the sea. The young wife endures this without a word of complaint. "She is a woman, such is her lot". A few years later she bears a second male child who suffers the same fate as his brother. The third one is a girl and she also has the same fate. Resigned and patient, Şābra suffers the worst indignities but endures them and never complains or rebels. Fifteen years later, as she grows old, the husband decides to take a second wife and entrusts her with the task of looking for one. She is instructed to find a bride as beautiful as herself. After a year of

searching she finds one who looks exactly like her but is fifteen years younger. The parents agree to give her in marriage. On the wedding day,

Şābra discovers that the new bride is her own daughter, that her two boys are alive, and that her husband throughout twenty years of marriage has only been testing her patience and resignation, for which he had had to pay loads of gold. (Her father asked for three loads of gold as a bride price). Şābra is finally reunited with her grown-up children and they live happily ever after.

I shall frame the interpretation of this tale around the political aspect of this household's life.

Şābra is silent, submissive and resigned. The restriction on the use of speech has often been interpreted as an indication of the absence of feminine power at the decision-making level. Viewed from a political angle, Şābra is obviously disadvantaged vis-a-vis her husband who holds a position of authority and has the legitimate right to make binding decisions for her. His role as a provider and the payment of bridewealth and the de facto assigned power gives him this right. He takes the decision to take away Şābra's children one by one and leads her into a series of actions - finding him a young bride, making the wedding arrangements, - which she performs in silence and without complaint. Şābra has never been forced to submit to physical violence, the force at work is cloaked in a different guise. The power exercised is a subtle moral pressure, a set of interiorised values and beliefs in which the master does not have to justify any of his actions, and the woman is required by the social norms to submit.

Resignation and patience are two qualities considered to be of paramount importance for a happy marriage. In a strongly felt aside Ghāya makes

the following comment: *illi ṣabrit baytha 'imrit*, 'the girl who is patient will build a happy home.' Girls receive a strict, if informal, training in deportment, so that they learn the ideals of femininity - silence, patience, resignation and servitude. These 'ideals' figure strongly in the intricate play and negotiations of marital arrangements. The silent and resigned girl once married would bring to her father quantities of gold and to her husband and family "happiness". She would know how never to protest, to be at his service all the time, give in to his demands and never complain, "She is a woman, such is her lot", Ghāya commented on one occasion. She added, *sīdik kān msāfir thlātha snīn la nqalqūh we lā na'milūh shūsha!*, 'your master has been away for three years, we should not cause him any trouble or discomfort him'. It is a woman's duty to see that her husband is well looked after. She should not disturb him on his return from a long and tiring trip. The roles are clearly defined and the moral pressure is there to reinforce them. The narrator's comment reveals that the traditional value system has dictated a form of patriarchy which is actively promoted by women. Women have interiorized a system that takes the superiority of the male for granted and accords woman an inferior status. However, some women, in spite of such careful education may not automatically be prepared to accept the inferior role, and minimum participation, and thus adopt other strategies in the face of oppression, as the following examples demonstrate.

4.5. Women's Ruses

The Vizier's Daughter (summary R2)

A prince is set against his vizier by envious rivals. He challenges him with riddles, but the vizier resolves them with the help of his witty daughter, 'Aysha. Defeated and realising the intelligence of the girl, the prince takes her as a bride only to suppress her and avenge himself. He shuts her up in a cave, starves her, and subjects her to a routine ritual questioning, but to the prince's dismay, she always has an answer and stands up to him. She manages to have a tunnel built between her cell and her parents' house. She would go every day to her parents' house, have a good meal and a good laugh and get back to her confined room in time for the ritual questions. On hearing about the prince's expedition to Sfax, 'Aysha decides to take the road before him. She arrives first, pitches her tent, dresses herself up in her best clothes and sits inside within sight of the road. The prince arrives and seeing the woman's beauty sends his guard to ask for her favours. She agrees to sleep with him on condition that he dresses in peasant's clothes and sells salty dry beans to her guards, barefoot.

Indignant but entranced the prince accepts. She grants him her favours and he offers her a ring bearing his seal. The following day just before dawn, 'Aysha and her guards disappear. A few months later she bears a child in her parents' house and gives him the name of Şūr. The same adventure happens twice again and two more children are born, "Ṭūr" and "Bint Frūkh al-Rūm". During those years 'Aysha was subjected to the same ritual questioning but stood up to the prince. Finally tired of this game and pressured by his father the prince decides to marry his cousin.

On the wedding day 'Aysha sends her three children to their father's house and instructs them to be disruptive and if anyone reprimands them, they should answer that it is their father's house and they have a right to do as they please. The children do as they were instructed. Soon the prince discovers his own children wearing the three distinctive gifts he had given to 'Aysha, who had posed as a foreigner, and realizes once again 'Aysha's sharp and lively wit. He asks for 'Aysha to be brought to him honoured. 'Aysha resumes her rightful place and the family is finally reunited and happy.

In the above example a woman uses a ruse as a strategy to make a man admit to being outwitted by a woman who did not fulfil his expectation of women being mentally inferior. To understand the significance of this position it is necessary to see it in the broader context of the Islamic culture which Tunisia shares with other Muslim societies.

Beldi society takes Islam as its conceptual framework. In Islam women are considered as second class Muslims and are therefore at a political disadvantage. This premise permeates all aspects of the relationship between men and women. Women are perceived as inferior and dependants according to traditional law. The Qur'ān also asserts in relation to men and women that men are "the managers of the affairs of women", and that "God in his bounty has preferred one of them over the other" (Arberry 1982: 105).

By virtue of this assertion, men are deemed superior. There is an element of intertextuality between the content of this tale and what the Qur'ān says. From the evidence of the tale, the view of woman's inferiority as propagated by the dominant male culture is challenged.

Contrary to Sābra's tale of silence and submission (tale R1), the 'Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), exhibits the image of the overriding female covert power I referred to earlier. It is a typical example of a manipulative witty female struggling against someone else's power, fighting for recognition and using speech and ruse as a strategy in attaining her ends. 'Aysha speaks and always has an answer. We understand discourse as power. Just like Sābra, the vizier's daughter is not in a position of authority, but instead of submitting, she uses her 'covert power' to circumvent the domestic power structure and gain for herself a recognition of her abilities. She resorts to indirect means. The secretive technique used by 'Aysha should be noted: she digs a tunnel, working in the dark to achieve her aims. This points to the secretive nature of the female manoeuvres. In a conversation with Ghāya following the tale, she explains: *al-muwājha ma tinfa'sh m'a al-rjāl, yilzimna dīma niṭḥāylu 'alīhum*, 'with men the use of confrontation has no result, whereas with ruse we achieve our ends'. Indirectness seems a female strategy.

Freund considers the use of the ruse to lie at the very heart of the power/phenomenon (*phénomène politique*) and describes it as a defensive mechanism used by the oppressed;

D'un coté - celui du pouvoir- il est question d'art, de calcul, de moyens ajustés a des fins....., de l'autre coté - celui des dominés - la conviction est faite que l'essentiel consiste a se "défendre". Mais toujours, a travers les mots et sous des habillages changeants, la ruse chemine (Freund 1977: 22).

Women's strategies are a response to the distribution of power and authority within the domestic sphere. Kandiyoti demonstrates that women's strategies and coping mechanisms are played out within a set of

constraints which she identifies as 'patriarchal bargains'. According to her, 'different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active and passive resistance in the face of oppression" (Kandiyoti 1988: 274).

Let us now consider other examples of strategies employed by women to attain their ends.

10.

Women are fickle (summary S18)

Once upon a time there was a man who had a wife who was dearer to him than life itself. One day she asked him to will her all his fortune. She eventually talked him into giving in to her demands and he soon found himself on the street. He lodged a complaint with the court. But he came before a qāḍi who was reputed to be a womanizer and who always decided in favour of women. Regardless of whether the man was the guilty party or not, the woman always triumphed in the end. In the penniless husband's case, the qāḍi decided once again in favour of the woman. Defeated and disappointed, the husband consulted a friend who advised him to seek out the qāḍi's wife who was known for her even-handedness. On hearing about the case, the qadi's wife was happy to intervene to redress the wrong and teach her husband a lesson.

It was the qāḍi's custom at home to have *couscous* for dinner on Fridays. One Friday he returned home from prayer, to find a delicious lamb *couscous* awaiting him. He washed and came back to enjoy his meal. But when he uncovered the dish, he found a meatless brown *couscous*. (the first is a finer quality and more delicate, the second is coarser food associated with less prosperous conditions). He turned to his wife to explain the mystery, but she

replied that that was what she had for the day. Imploring God's assistance, the qāḍi went to his wife's parents to tell them that their daughter had gone mad. When the qāḍi returned with his father and brothers in law, he thought he must be dreaming, as a delicious lamb *couscous* was served up. "You have gone mad yourself", the father-in-law said. The qāḍi was tied up and beaten by her brothers. The wife finally intervened to explain that the ruse was played out only because of the qāḍi's unfairness and weakness for women. From that day on, no woman ever succeeded in influencing him unfairly.

The tale presents a good example of what has been discussed earlier in relation to women's covert power or 'power of the weak', defined as the ability of a person to use indirect means to exert control where she/he cannot exert direct control. In the present context a husband is dissolute and abuses his power. His wife takes advantage of the situation to further her own legitimate case, punishing him for his libertinage. We are presented here with retribution which has an element of justice to it, the very moral framework within which powerlessness and a power imbalance operate. The female is at a political disadvantage; she has no power and she is required by social norms not to protest or confront her husband. Her husband abuses his power and engages in promiscuous behaviour. Since she is not in a position of authority, she resorts to subterfuge rather than confrontation to teach him a lesson in marital fidelity and redress the balance of power.

A further example,

The Clever Peasant Girl (summary K4).

Once upon a time there was a king who used to wander around the town, in disguise, to see to his people's well being. One day, attended by his vizier, he came to a farm where there was a waterwheel turning. The king stood listening and asked the vizier to interpret what the waterwheel was supposedly saying. Perplexed, the vizier said "what could a waterwheel say?" He was granted three days to solve the enigma. The vizier, under pressure from his daughter went to see an elderly peasant to seek his help in solving the enigma, but the clue came from the peasant's clever daughter. He hurried to the king and gave him the answer. But the king sensed that it was not the result of his own effort, and asked him to tell him the truth. On hearing about the witty and clever bedouin girl, he decided to take her as a bride. She agreed on condition that she could sit veiled and silent in his daily council and follow the proceedings. One day, when the king did not judge a case fairly, she intervened indirectly using trickery to redress the wrong. The king took it as a humiliation and insult and decided to divorce her granting her the possibility of taking with her what she considered most valuable. That night, the clever young wife gave him a sleeping potion and took him to her parents' tent in a chest as her most cherished possession. When the wind blew strongly the king awoke and realized what had happened. He took his wife back to the palace and allowed her to sit with him in his court from then on as his adviser.

Like 'Aysha in the tale of the vizier's daughter, the heroine is struggling to gain some power. The exigencies of her inferior position force her to take intelligent covert action and use a trick to solve her problem and that

of the wronged man, and like 'Aysha, she achieves her desired end and redresses the balance of power.

From the above evidence, in 'the Vizier's Daughter and 'The Clever Peasant Girl', a structure prevails: the women suffer set backs, they are punished but triumph in the end. Intelligence is obviously the most outstanding and potentially dangerous power a woman can use over a man. Attractiveness is also purposely used as another weapon against man, as the following examples will demonstrate.

Women's wiles (summary S26)

Once upon a time there was a silk master merchant who kept a store and above it he had hung a sign which read *kīd al-rjāl suttāsh*, 'man's wiles are sixteen times more powerful'. One day the daughter of the master merchant passed through that part of the Suq. She saw the sign, it angered her and she decided to teach him a lesson. In the morning she dressed herself in her finest clothes and went to the merchant. She stepped in, greeted him and collapsed in tears. The merchant was surprised. The girl went on to show him her long beautiful hair and bare arms and legs and asked him if he saw any fault in them. The merchant answered he never saw anything as beautiful. By then he was lost. The girl explained that she was the qāḍi's daughter and that whenever a suitor came to ask for her hand her father refused saying she was bald, lame, and her eyes were crossed. Having heard the tale, the merchant said he would go himself, ask for her hand and insist.

The next day after the afternoon prayer, the master merchant went to see the qāḍi to ask for his daughter's hand as agreed, but he denied having a daughter. The merchant insisted and explained that he knew about the girl's defects and

was prepared to accept. The qāḍi asked for a thousand dinars bride price and they came to an agreement. On the wedding day, the merchant was presented with a covered bridal basket which he took to be the girl's trousseau, but when he looked inside he discovered a bald and squint-eyed bride. He realised the girl had played a trick on him. Next day he was back in his store, sad and depressed. Soon the master merchant's daughter came along laughing. The merchant asked why she had set a trap for him. She explained that it was all because of the sign he had hung on his store and she suggested she would help him if he changed it to read to *kīd al-nsa ma thammāsh*, 'woman's wile has no equal/is more powerful', which he did. She asked him to invite some bedouins from Jläss and hire some tinkers with their pipes and drums to come to his house and pose as his family and celebrate the wedding. The qāḍi would certainly demand that there be a divorce as he would not be prepared to allow a marriage with someone of a peasant background. The merchant did exactly what the girl had told him. The qāḍi was enraged and asked for a divorce. The first thing the merchant did was to go and ask for the master merchant's daughter and insisted on seeing the girl before marriage, so as not to be taken in twice.

The Silk Merchant and His Neighbour (summary S12)

Once upon a time there was a beautiful married woman who lived near a silk weaver. She went to see him one day to buy a *fūṭa*, 'a kind of African wrap'. He offered to weave her a gold and silver striped *fūṭa*, such as she had never seen before. Every day the woman dressed herself in her best clothes and went and sat in the weaver's shop displaying her bare arms and legs, watching the weaving in progress. After some time, she decided to go home and return in the afternoon to collect the *fūṭa*. When she failed to return, the

merchant went to the house to deliver the *fūṭa* himself, but he was received by her husband who beat him for his disregard for a man's *ḥurma* (wife, therefore forbidden).

The two tales present further examples of manipulative females, purposely using seduction as a covert tactic to attain their ends, in the first a recognition of women's superior intellect, in the second a free golden-striped *fūṭa* and a lesson in respect and good conduct towards someone else's wife. Both women go beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour to further a legitimate case. According to the dominant ideology the two women's immoral actions are inexcusable, but the outcome of these stories shows that what matters for women is to find an effective solution even if the standards of the dominant cultural model must sometimes be ignored. In yet another tale a woman seriously transgresses the moral code and uses trickery to deceive her husband. In the course of the tale the transgression is never subjected to any value judgement as the next example will show:

Bāba Turki(summary R5)

Once upon a time there lived a man nicknamed 'Bāba Turki' because of his Turkish origin. Bāba Turki's young wife had a lover who used to come and visit her during the day when Bāba Turki was out. One day, Bāba Turki came back unexpectedly to the house. Taken aback, his wife hid her lover in an inner room and came to distract her husband's attention by telling him about their neighbour's unfaithful wife and how she had with her sister's help held up a

sheet to hide her lover as he made his escape. As she demonstrated with her own sister how it had been done, her lover made his escape.

In this example a married woman is involved in illicit sex and uses cunning to deceive her husband who appears naive and stupid. In normal circumstances a woman's unfaithfulness is heavily punished, but in the current context the wife's transgression is glossed over. In her enterprise she is helped by yet another female. This tale points to women co-operating to surreptitiously subvert male power. The use of the sheet as a cover is quite significant. It points to the secretive nature of women's manoeuvres.

Lying, trickery, and deception are presented as justifiable tools for the clever female. In many tales it is assumed without any evidence that woman is the mistress of intrigue, a theme which is borrowed from *The Arabian Nights* and a very common topic in female gatherings. We note that in most cases ruse is used by women as a strategy that enables them to claim what their culture denies them: speech, power and sexuality (tale R2, R5; K4; S26, S18).

4.5. Concluding remarks

The above discussion, based on the evidence of Beldi women's tales, centres around women's relationships to the allocation of power and the strategies they employ in attaining their ends, whether this entails making decisions themselves or exercising influence over those who make decisions, i.e. mothers exerting pressure on their sons (tale R4), or using

subversive tactics to circumvent domestic power (tales R2, R5; S12, S10, S18, S26; K4).

The women described above range from the submissive obedient (tale R1, R 13), to the most manipulative and cunning (R2, R5; S10, S12, S18; S26; K4). Whereas some of the tales are conservative in the sense that they perpetuate an idealisation of father/daughter, husband/wife relationships (obedience repaid by eternal happy marriage, tale R1), many of the women are active and intelligent (tales R2, R5; S10, S12, S18, S26; K4). As they are not often in a position of power they resort to subterfuge, their 'covert power', or 'power of the weak', rather than confrontation.

Jean Freund defines ruse as a strategy for the powerless, to undermine from within a system that one cannot confront directly:

La ruse consiste à user, corrodér de l'intérieur un système qu'on ne peut attaquer de front (Freund 1977: 28).

Wit, intelligence (tales R2; S10, S18; K4) and seduction (tales S26; S12) are variously employed and prove the most potentially dangerous power a woman may use over a man; dangerous in the sense that a man deliberately confused and tricked may lose his ascendancy over woman as was demonstrated in 'the Vizier's Daughter' (tale S2), 'the Clever Peasant Girl' (tale K4) and 'Women are Fickle' (tale S18).

Many women are portrayed as struggling against the exercise of someone else's power. Disadvantaged vis-a-vis their men and brought up in the tradition of patience and resignation as 'feminine ideals', a tradition that controls rather than protects, women are forced to turn to 'covert power' to find effective solutions to redress the balance of power, even when the solution involves serious transgression of moral and social codes. The

analysis of women's strategies reveals that they are played out to resist, not to accomodate to the patriarchal system. In his study of traditional Calabrian society, Zagnoli demonstrates that within that system, women are suppressed under the code of honour and shame and experience different forms of economic and intellectual subordination. This oppressive system entails the use of ruse as an exclusively female strategy and as an exercise of autonomy:

La ruse féminine apparait comme un modèle transposable au plan social: en effet, la honte féminine, dans ses aspects de retenue, de non affirmation de désir, de subordination, d'obéissance, de silence, entraine nécessairement, en cas de conflit, de rupture du consensus féminin, la mise en oeuvre d'une stratégie de ruse. Dans ce système, les femmes (et les enfants) se trouvent dans un rapport de subordination. C'est un rapport dissémetrique, vertical, de respect inegalitaire, implique le niveau hierarchique. Dans ce contexte, la ruse féminine apparait comme un exercice d'autonomie féminine jouant comme un pouvoir occulte a l'encontre des hommes (Zagnoli 1984: 182).

Similarly, within the dominant Beldi system, women disadvantaged vis-a-vis their men constitute a sort of 'secret' micro-society strategizing within the social and cultural order.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CULTURE OF SHAME VERSUS A CULTURE OF LOVE

5.1. Introduction

The code of modesty constitutes a fundamental pattern in the Beldi ideals of sexual behaviour as expressed in the tales. It is quite specific when it is linked to the sexual life of the Beldi. Here the code will be described as it manifests itself in the tales. Related beliefs will be examined, in particular, those pertaining to women, limiting their freedom and prescribing modesty in their sexual behaviour.

A Beldi family's *sharaf*, 'honour' is gauged by the sexual comportment of its women. The maintenance of family honour requires control over women by the man who is morally responsible for them, namely their father, brother or husband. Many tales portray women sharing this code of honour. In contrast many others present an alternative image of women which conflicts with the established model, and express a divergent consciousness which in many ways rejects this male control of their persons, proposing instead a model of women's management of their own bodies and their emotional life.

In the first part, I shall present and analyse the concept of female/male sexuality as embodied in 'the modesty code'. In the second, I will concentrate on the rebellious/liberal alternative consciousness.

5.2. A culture of shame

Al-hishma, 'modesty' is expressed in a variety of ways and particularly through the sexual behaviour of women. Modesty as it is expressed in the tales has three components: it includes, firstly, modes of covering for various parts of the body, head, arms, legs and the whole body; then more broadly, various accepted female character traits such as humility, shyness and bashfulness; and most widely, instructions associated with customs and beliefs relating to female seclusion, chastity and fidelity. Each aspect will be analysed first in terms of its treatment in the tales, and then in terms of the informants' interpretations.

5.2 1. Modesty/appearance

In previous times young married women did not generally come face to face with their fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law; if they did they had to cover their heads (tale S22). The covering of the woman's head is observed especially when a woman comes face to face with unrelated male guests:

I was married to a man and we lived in the same room. One day he came back with a guest, I put on a head scarf and slipped into the bed recess (tale R11).

The *qādi's* wife covered her head and came to talk to the stranger through the door (tale S18).

Women are required to keep out of public places. If they leave their home, they go veiled from head to toe. Women are all described as 'wrapping

themselves in their *sifsāri*, 'white veil', and putting on *al-khāma*, 'a black face veil'. (tales: R1, R3, R11, R13, R15; S4, S7, S10, S11, S25)

I put on my *sifsāri*, my *khāma* and *rīhiyya* and went out.
(tale R11).

She put on her *sifsāri* and went out (tale R1).

By means of the veil a woman maintains symbolic distance between herself and male outsiders.

Girls of marriageable age, for their part, should not cut their hair or uncover it. Uncovering the head and showing one's hair loose before marriage is a violation of the modesty code because it suggests a manifestation of sexuality and 'une disponibilité à l'amour' (Labidi 1989: 56). An example is found in 'the Sparkling Maiden' (tale S20), where it is said on the occasion of cutting the bride's hair in the ceremonial ritual of *qassān al-Dlāl*, (meaning 'putting an end to a girl's spoiling by her parents'), that "her hair had never been seen before, as tradition had it that a girl of marriageable age should bind her hair in an '*oksa*' and never show it to her male kinsmen or keep it loose, let alone her arms and legs", the narrator Sa'diyya commented. As soon as they are capable of provoking men's desires, girls are shorn of their hair as the sign of their femininity. At puberty and in a ceremonial ritual led by an elderly woman, a girl's long hair is tied and 'bandaged' in an '*oksa*' and she will never show it loose or cut it until her marriage. The same restrictions are added to those which concern the exposure of the female body. Showing one's body is a sign of disrespect and a violation of the code.

The two girls undressed and wanted to try it for themselves. They smeared the cream all over their bodies and started playing around carrying each other on their shoulders. The father-in-law came back from work and was shocked at what he saw. He retired hurriedly to his room shouting: *idhā lam tastāḥi faṣna' ma shi'ta, ma 'ādish ḥishma we qdar*, 'If you do not feel ashamed you can do what you want, there is no more modesty and respect in this house' (tale S22).

The girls' husbands were summoned to discipline their wives. Girls are expected to carry themselves in a manner that suggests that they subscribe to the tenets of sexual modesty: their body is taboo and should be concealed from the gaze of men. A modest woman is usually referred to as *mastūra*, 'covered'.

The traditional garments of female covering are often taken as symbols of an Islamic ethos regarding sexual modesty and morality which is instilled into girls at an early age, as Bousquet pointed out:

Le corps des filles musulmanes est une cartographie où vient s'inscrire les codes d'une morale; d'une esthétique reçue, des dar *al-m'allma* au cours de leur vécu quotidien (Bousquet 1983:56).

Veiling and the values that underlie it must be interpreted within this religious context. Veiling and female modesty are based on the code of sexual modesty as spelled out in the Qur'ān and oral tradition:

And say to the believing women to cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward, and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not

reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons. or such men as attend them, not having sexual desire, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts. Sūrah XXI (Arberry 1982: 355).

Ashadd ḥaya min al-Adhāra fī khidriha

'Shier than a veiled virgin' (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari, Bab al-ḥaya, Vol 8: 88).

5.2.2. Modesty in character traits

The second aspect of modesty refers to various female character traits: humility, shyness, discretion and modesty summed up in the Arabic expression *ḥishma w ja'ra wa rās wāṭi*, 'modesty, shyness and lowered head'. Most of the girls described in the tales received from their mothers a strict, if informal, training in deportment, so that they learned the graces and ideals of femininity, propriety, discretion and modesty (tales S1, S4, S22, S23).

Discretion meant that girls learned not to speak loudly or answer back. An example is found in 'the wicked mother-in-law' (tale S23). Several daughters-in-law are treated badly by their mother-in-law, relegated to the status of servants, and starve, until they grow thinner every day, die of hunger and never complain to anyone. "The new bride was also shy and modest and never complained to her husband about her mistreatment, as Beldi culture prevented her from speaking out" (tale S23).

Shyness is generally appreciated in a woman and is taken as a sign of fine breeding and good manners, a good prize for a man to win. A good example is found in 'Şābra' (tale R1). Şābra's father asked for three loads of gold as a bride price, one for Şābra's beauty, one for her modesty and one for her wisdom.

A girl's duty to herself and her family is to safeguard herself against all critical allusions to her modesty to guarantee a fine husband. Sharqat, the poor man's daughter, in 'the sparkling maiden' (tale S 20), is described as her *m'allama's* "favourite one because, unlike her cousin Za'frāna, she is modest and shy, and never speaks loudly".

M'allma is the 'mistress' in a traditional institution called *Dār al-m'allma* where girls are sent to learn the domestic tasks, sewing, embroidering, lace making, and female virtues. *Al-m'allmāt* have the reputation of being extremely strict in relation to the girls' upbringing, and they are always likely to succeed where mothers fail.

Silence is valued very strongly and is considered an indication of modesty and good upbringing. In 'Şābra', mentioned above, a man marries a woman and kills their children one by one, but "she never showed a sign of grief and never uttered a word of complaint" (tale R1). He praises her saying: "You were well-mannered, you never raised your voice, you never complained, may the womb that bore you be blessed." A woman's silence will avoid troubling the man, *shush, sīdik mrawwaḥ min al-sfar ba'd thlātha snīn na'milluh shūsha*, 'your master has been away for three years; we will not trouble and discomfort him', says Şābra to Dāda her maid, who came back wailing after she had seen her master throw his child into the depths of the sea. Therefore keeping silence becomes an element of proper behaviour.

In yet another tale, a girl overhears her father's conversation with a donkey's head about her future misfortune, but she remains silent even though it is her own future which is discussed. On this occasion the narrator, Khira recalls nostalgically the strict education, *tarbiyya* of olden days which considered it shameful for a girl to make her voice heard. *bikri kānu al-bnāt ṣawthum ma yitsma'sh khalli 'ād tnaghniḡhum we shakwāthum*, 'in olden times, girls were modest, their voices were not to be heard, let alone their complaints and grievances.' (tale K2)

Loudness and arrogance are grounds for divorce. In 'the frivolous' (tale S 22), a young bride is loud and arrogant. Her mother-in-law tries to teach her humility and decorum, but she would not learn. So she is sent back in shame to her father's house.

It is obvious throughout the tales that the girls are always described in terms of their appeal to men, their suitability as wives. Silence and modesty are particularly appreciated attributes in a woman.

5.2.3. Modesty in sexual behaviour

The most crucial aspect of the code is that which limits women's freedom of movement and prescribes modesty in their sexual behaviour. This means that girls of marriageable age and young women should keep out of public places so as not to jeopardize their reputation, compromise their honour and bring *al-'ār*, 'shame' on their family.

5.2.3.1. Seclusion

I have demonstrated in chapter four that the Beldi household as portrayed in the tales is patriarchal with the senior male of the house as the household head in general, possessing the ultimate right of decision over women's lives and control of their persons. A man's house appears throughout the tales as a sanctuary in which the integrity of women is protected. In order to defend the family's honour and its women from the male world, women's behaviour is tightly controlled.

Seven daughters are locked up by their father who went on pilgrimage to Mecca:

As protection, the father put seven locks on the house, telling each girl that she should not go beyond the threshold (tale R16).

Rdāḥ, the only daughter of the king of Tunis is put in a separate palace under strict surveillance:

Out of concern to have her secluded, the king built a glass palace for her private use. Only Dāda, her maid was living with her. The king and the queen visited her once a week (tale S2).

Indeed the division of the internal space in the house - *maqṣūra*, the small intimate room (tale K2), private apartment (tales S2, S3; R7), separate upper floor (tale S11) - serve to seclude women, particularly the girls of the house. Separate apartments and inner rooms are confined parts of the house which are not entered by male outsiders, and they are the expression of the physical seclusion of women from the public world. Bourdieu identifies female space with the house in terms of homologous oppositions. He identifies female space with the house as opposed to male space which is the place of assembly, the market and the fields. *Hurma* is "the inside",

"the feminine world, the world of the secret, the enclosed space of the household, in contrast to the open world of the public square, reserved for men" (Bourdieu 1965: 219). It follows that *ḥaram* is (namely, taboo in the exact sense) female and associated with the inside. The link between gender classification and spatial arrangement is an ethnographic common place. This link is predicated on the assumption that the spatio-temporal organisation is congruent with the prevailing moral categories. In accordance with the Islamic concept of *ḥurma* women fall into the category of persons and places which are inviolable and worthy of protection. Women are seen as part of men's violable physical and social space which it is their duty to protect. In 'the silk weaver and his neighbour' (tale S12), a husband comes out to beat a merchant to punish him for attempting to seduce his wife:

The weaver went on weaving and daydreaming of the beautiful woman and the merriment the afternoon held in store for him. He waited and waited, but the woman failed to return, so he decided to go and deliver the *fūṭa* himself. He went next door and knocked. To his surprise, it was the husband who answered, but he came out with a stick and beat the merchant mercilessly, to punish him for attempting to seduce his *ḥurma*, 'forbidden woman' (tale S12).

Abou Zeid (1965), has given a description of the rules of sanctuary among the Bedouins of Cyrenaica who, in conformity with Arab custom, refer to it by the word *ḥarām*, from the same root as the word for womenfolk, *ḥarīm/ḥurma*, 'sacred, that which is prohibited'.

The norm of seclusion is adhered to faithfully and remains a strong and explicit norm of behaviour. All the girls, with a few exceptions, are

described as having never set foot outside home. If a woman violates the rule of seclusion she sullies her husband's honour and deserves the pejorative stigma of *hāmla*, 'promiscuous'. In the tale 'women of the moon' (tale R11), four old divorcees met to discuss the 'good old days and the story of their marriages'. One of them related that her husband called her a *hāmla* and sent her back in shame to her father's home after discovering that she had spent the whole day out. A man's honour is in part defined by women. In this context, it is the husband and not the woman herself who loses face by such behaviour.

How could I have honour any more with my wife *hāmla* all day on the street (tale R11).

In her book *Sex, Islam and Ideology*, Mernissi (1983) pointed out that in North African Muslim society, honour is a highly emotionally charged concept which relates men's prestige to the sexual behaviour of the women under their authority, be they wives, sisters or mothers. Staying at home means maintaining the integrity of the household. The respect of the home depends on respect for the woman in it. Women's visibility in the street is not considered acceptable. The street, going out, constitutes a threat to their respectability and that of their kin. Men's place was in the public domain and called for their visibility; women were to be at home and remain invisible to the public. A digression from this traditional division would reflect badly on the woman and her family/husband, and might challenge the very structure of patriarchy.

Traditionally only necessity could justify a woman's presence outside the home. *Bnāt al-'aylāt ma kānūsh yukhrju kan waqt al-lāzim, emma al-qhāb yhūmū fi al-shwāra*, 'respectable women were not seen on the street.

Only prostitutes wander freely in the streets', the narrator Ghāya commented.

In a discussion of the control of women and strict surveillance with my informants, Ghāya and Sa'diyya, it became clear that they believed that women and men cannot meet without the presence of Satan. They are bound to give in to their *shahawāt*, 'sexual drives'. One of them added: *al-nār we al-bārūd ma yitqāblūsh*, 'fire and gunpowder don't mix'. Women are credited with similar sexual impulses and needs as men. It is believed that without male supervision women cannot be trusted. Sometimes supervision is not sufficient. Some women, guardians of traditions, resort to the magico-religious technique of *tasfīh* (Labidi 1989), a protection system meant to make girls unrapeable in the face of any unpredictable circumstances. Virginity rites are undergone by girls at puberty. These rites are supposed to lock in the potential sexuality of a girl.

5.2.3.2. Denial of sexuality

In the tales under study, the house provides the focus for all women's and girls' activities with the exception of occasional visits to shrines and the turkish baths (tale S1, S1, S 22).

In regard to socialization, girls are under the absolute control of women, their mothers and *m'allmāt* in *dār al-m'allma*. Throughout the period of their growing up they are taught to obey and respect the men of the family. They soon learn the ethics of pre-marital chastity, the reverent fear of men and the meaning of *sharaf*, 'honour', and *al-'ār*, 'shame', that means being housebound and morally beyond reproach, for a girl's honour depended on her chastity/virginity. Many girls adhere to these ideals of femininity, observe strictly the rules and refrain from any deviant behaviour which

would destroy the honour of the family, as the following example will demonstrate.

The virtuous (summary R3)

Once upon a time there was a merchant who had a boy and a girl. One day he fell ill and sensed his hour had come. On his death bed he called his daughter and told her that he had left her and her younger brother the shop and a jar full of gold coins and asked her to take good care of him. With that he breathed his last.

When her brother turned fourteen she called him and asked him: "What would you do if I gave you a hundred dinars?" "I'd buy a bike", he answered. "He's still young", she thought to herself. When he was eighteen she asked him the same ritual question. This time he answered: "I'd open my father's shop and start work." She said to herself "Now he is grown up." She told him, "I'll borrow some money from our neighbour and when you begin to make a profit you can pay her back."

After he left she went to the store-room and took a hundred dinars from the jar, which she sealed again. When he came back she gave him the money. The following day he went to the *sūq* and opened the shop. He threw out what had deteriorated and displayed the rest. He went to one of his father's fellow merchants and asked him to teach him the trade. The man was delighted at the initiative and praised him for not letting his father's trade die out. Time passed and he soon became a master-merchant in the *sūq* employing apprentices.

One day as he was working in his shop, a man passed selling a bird which could sing and tell stories. "I should buy it for my sister to entertain her and give her company in her isolation", he said to himself. So he bought it and took it to his

sister. Each and every day the sister would see to the household chores and sit listening to the bird.

One day, a group of merchants decided on a business trip. The young man was asked to participate. He went back and informed his sister of his plan. She prepared a year's provisions for him. He instructed her not to go out and to look after herself, bade her farewell and left.

The expedition reached Baghdad. The merchants would buy and sell during the day and gather at night to play cards and chat. One evening the topic of women's fickleness was raised. Some maintained that women in general are fickle, others said their wives and sisters were not. The brother intervened with great pride to say that his sister had never stepped across the threshold and was the most virtuous of all. One merchant said he would bet on it. He asked the brother if his sister had a distinguishing birth mark on her body. The brother said she had. So they agreed that if the merchant discovered it, he would win all the brother's fortune.

The merchant took ship and arrived in the young man's town. He went to the house and watched from a distance every day, but no sign of the woman appeared. So he sought out an old witch, told her the story and asked her to help him reach her and he would give her two purses of gold in exchange. They came to an agreement and he directed her to the woman's house.

The old witch dressed herself in a green robe, covered herself with a green shawl, painted her stick green and went to see the woman. She knocked on the door and posed as the woman's aunt who had been prevented by her father, 'God rest his soul', from visiting her. The woman was taken in by her sweet words, let her in and entertained her to tea, before she left. The old woman

would come and visit her every day. One day she came to invite her to attend her daughter's wedding. The woman refused, explaining that she had never set foot outside and that her brother would reprimand her, but the old witch persisted and she eventually talked her into accepting. As the woman was about to go out the bird addressed her, requesting her to sit and listen to one of his stories. The old witch was infuriated but the woman took off her veil and sat down to listen. The story warned that if she went out she would regret it. So the woman put her veil away and informed the old witch that she had changed her mind. The old witch left in a rage and went straight to the merchant to tell him that it was an impossible task. Then the merchant mentioned the birth mark. The old witch had an idea.

She went to visit the woman on a scorching hot afternoon and suggested she should take a refreshing shower as 'the woman's hair looked dirty'. She heated some water and they went into the kitchen. As the woman was taking off her clothes, she noticed the birth-mark: like a slice of water melon visible on her thigh. As soon as she saw it she took to her heels to find the man. On hearing about it, the merchant went back to the brother and told him he had had his sister, proving it by describing her birth-mark. So the brother signed all his property over to the merchant and became his slave. Later he opened a doughnut shop to make a living.

Time passed and the woman's brother did not come back. She started to worry. The bird told her that her brother was a slave to a merchant selling doughnuts. So she immediately disguised herself in men's clothes and travelled to Baghdad. She found her brother and enquired about what had happened. He recounted his story with the merchant and she related to him what had actually happened, explaining that she had not been brought up to disgrace her family. She

redeemed her brother who recovered his respectable place among the merchants and the other merchant was jailed.

In the above lengthy example the behaviour and attitudes of the female character are powerfully shaped by the cultural ideals of honour and shame which have been fostered in her since an early age. The internalized ethics of pre-marital chastity and family honour prevent her from abusing her liberty when a favorable occasion presented itself. "I am my mother's daughter, *bint ummi*, I have not been brought up to disgrace my family's *sharaf* 'honour'," concludes the heroine after explaining to her brother that the merchant's story of sullyng her honour was a slander.

Before leaving the brother bequeaths a substitute in the person of the bird, explicitly designed to watch over and guard the sister. When she is invited to go out, the bird does not fail to fulfil its role and reminds her of the prohibition of the master: 'if you go out you will regret it'; in other words 'you will compromise your virginity.' The closed door symbolizes the girl's virginity.

The jealousy the brother publicly demonstrates in guarding his sister's honour is intense. His concern for maintaining his honour takes the form of an obsession with the sexual conduct of his sister: "She has never stepped across the threshold, no man has ever seen her toe", he says proudly.

It is the woman's personal behaviour which threatens to undermine his prestige. The chastity of the girl is a matter that (oddly enough) concerns not herself, but rather her younger brother who finds himself disgraced when her supposed violation of the code of sexual behaviour became public knowledge. The man is dishonoured, loses 'his manliness', social standing and respect and becomes a slave to the merchant.

Al-‘ār, is the Arabic word for shame. Actions of *al-‘ār* in this context fall on the shoulders of not only the girl herself but on her brother, who stands in a unique position in relation to her especially as far as her sexual life is concerned. In another version of the same story, 'the water melon slice' (tale S4), it is the husband's honour which is sullied by his wife's infidelity. He also loses the respect of his fellow merchants and signs all his fortune over to the merchant.

In opposition to *al-ḥishma* which reflects only on an individual, *al-‘ār* is a collective attribute; its actions fall on the family. In an analysis of the concept of honour in an Andalusian village, J. Pitt-Rivers came to the same conclusion:

Honour is a collective attribute shared by the nuclear family. Individual honour derives from individual conduct but produces consequences for others who share collective honour with the individual (Pitt-Rivers 1977: 24) .

This idea is even more explicit in the following tale which presents the danger of 'the loss of virginity' as the cause of the most terrible shame, *‘ār*, which is to cast an entire family, seven brothers and their father into total humiliation:

The bird without wings (summary S11)

Once upon a time there was a merchant who had seven sons and one daughter. She grew up well bred and well read, and learned all the domestic skills. She sat every day embroidering on the terrace. One day the prince's bird flew off, so he followed it from roof to roof until he came to where the girl sat. He saw her

and marvelled at her beauty. He went back to the palace and feigned illness. All the court physicians were called but could not find anything wrong. The prince then requested the old witch to be brought. When she came he confided his secret to her and she promised to help bring the girl to him.

The old witch dressed herself in a green robe, picked up a green stick and went out to search for the girl's house. When she arrived in front of the door, the maid was washing the floor and accidentally splashed the old woman. She started to shout and insult the maid. On hearing the commotion, the mistress of the house went out to investigate. The old woman complained to her about the incident and she invited her to come into the house and change her wet clothes. Now out of concern to keep her secluded, the merchant had had a private apartment built on the upper floor for his daughter's use.

The old witch came in, changed into dry clothes, and not seeing the girl in question, enquired whether the woman lived on her own. The woman informed her that she had seven sons working in their father's silk business and a daughter living upstairs. Soon the seven sons and their father came back for supper. The old woman was invited to join them. Over the meal she entertained them with tales of the Prophet 'God have peace and mercy on him', and jokes.

When night fell, the old woman made as if to leave. The mistress of the house and her daughter were greatly entertained by her company and asked her to stay three days and three nights, as was the tradition established by the Prophet. So she stayed with the girl in her private apartment in the upper floor before leaving. A week later she came back to the house and informed the mistress that her own daughter, her 'only daughter', was getting married the following Thursday and that she wanted the girl's 'sister', the merchant's daughter to attend her *henna* ceremony. The mistress declined on the grounds that her father and brothers would kill the girl if they knew she had stepped across the threshold. The old woman eventually talked her into accepting. On Thursday the girl put on her

best clothes and finery and left with the old woman. Her mother gave her a handkerchief full of sand to mark her path as she had never ventured outside the house, in case anything happened.

The girl and the old woman walked and walked until they came to a house and went in. There they found a handsome young man waiting. The girl soon understood she was trapped and that her 'ard, 'honour', was at stake. But she hadn't forgotten to sprinkle sand along her way. The old witch took a purse of gold and left.

The young man and the girl ate, talked and laughed. At the same time the girl concentrated on forming a plan to escape. She asked permission to go to the toilet after she changed into a night gown he gave her. Not trusting her, the prince tied her to his cummerbund, *shamlā*. As she returned she found two doves settling in the courtyard. She hurriedly untied the *shamlā*, attached it to the two doves and ran away following the trail of sand until she reached the house. Her mother on seeing her dressed only in a nightgown, feared for the worst but her daughter reassured her that nothing had happened.

Meanwhile the prince waited and waited and when she failed to return he tugged on the *shamlā*. But to his great disappointment he discovered the two doves at the other end. So he went back to the palace and pretended to be ill. Concerned about his son, the king told him he would have anything he wanted brought before him. The prince said he wanted to rule for three days. His father accepted.

So the prince announced that he had had a dream and that he would give a reward to whoever interpreted it best for him.

The dream was :

ṭayr ṭār la jnāḥ we la munqār

jātni fī alf maksīyya

rawwaḥat fī sūriyya

a bird without wings and beak took to the air.

It came decked in its finery and left in a simple petticoat.

All the members of the merchants' guild came to give their interpretations of the dream. Finally came the turn of the seven brothers. The topic had been discussed at home. The girl suggested in private the following interpretation to her youngest brother:

law mā tār khallaf al-'ār

ḥammam al-sba' shwāshi we al-thāmna di al-dār

ifrish al-zarbiyya we kaththar al-dinār

we khūdh banāt al-tujjār blāsh 'ār

If it hadn't flown it would have brought shame on

the seven brothers' *shashiyyas* and their father's.

Propose and do not bring shame on the merchant's family.

The young brother recounted his interpretation to the prince who hurried to ask his father for the merchant's daughter's hand.

When she felt she was trapped by the young man, the merchant's daughter feared for her '*arḍ*' reputation/honour', *khāfīt 'ala 'arḍha*.

Abou Zeid discusses honour and shame among the Bedouins of the western desert of Egypt. He draws a distinction between *sharaf* and '*Irḍ*', two terms translated into English as 'honour'. '*Arḍ*', the term for honour in the second tale, is not an exact translation, for as Abou Zeid explains, it is "used only in connection with female chastity" (Abou Zeid 1965: 256).

A means intended to protect a girl's virginity is her seclusion. This means a separation of women from the outside world where she might lose her

honour and that of the family. Her mother is very reluctant to allow her daughter to go out: "Her father and brothers will kill me if they know", she said to the old lady. She is afraid of the males' reactions and protective of the girl's virginity.

Virginity is the female capital of the merchant's daughter. Custom insists that she must not lose it. The family's honour represented by the eight *shashiyyas*, referring to the male heads, depends on it. In Tunisia the *shashiyya*, 'red knitted cap', is commonly said to symbolize family honour. It is said to be *m'angra*, 'straight', if a bride is proved to be a virgin on her wedding night.

On seeing her daughter coming back in a nightgown, the mother fears the worst, meaning the loss of her virginity, but her daughter reassures her in a subtle way that the family's honour was *al-ḥamdu lillāh labās*, 'thanks to God, safe'.

Indeed it is a most humiliating and destructive blow to the honour of a lineage if a girl is discovered to have yielded to her sexual impulses outside marriage. Cleansing with blood is common in villages as 'the chief's daughter' (tale S19), illustrates. On hearing about his unmarried sister's

pregnancy, a brother takes his sister under a scorching sun to a distant deserted land and leaves her to die of hunger and thirst.

Within Beldi circles it is usually dealt with among the close relatives. *Al-luṭf aḥna naḥkīw 'ala al-shay ḥādha*, *al-'arab ya'mlu shūha*, 'God forbid! Among the Beldi it is not something to talk about, only bedouins publicize it, *shūha*! 'It's a shame',", Sa'diyya explained, in a discussion of virginity following the tale. She remembers this happening only once in real life. The neighbour's daughter was sent back home in shame, wrapped in a white sheet the same wedding night. Among Beldi families *al-tufla idha shin'it yib'athūha li dar būha fi malḥafa*, 'if a girl is

proved not to be a virgin on her wedding night, she is sent back home on the same night in a white sheet', meaning she loses all her belongings, jewellery, trousseau and so on. The incident is kept among close relatives. The paramount importance of virginity for women is a well known phenomenon in traditional Tunisian society. Pre-marital sexual relations are the most condemned and shameful act in the case of women. For men, on the other hand, violating the code does not diminish their own honour, but is tacitly tolerated. The two men involved, the prince and the merchant, have not been subjected to any reproach. Their actions are not seen as shameful and do not raise any indignation or disapproval from their fellow merchants. Different standards of conduct are demanded from men and women.

The custom of arranged marriage is a direct result of the notion of honour and the parents' fear that their daughters may be deflowered before marriage, thereby dishonouring the family. When they reach puberty girls are married off (tales S1, S5, S22, S27; R1).

The concept of virginity still figures in the universe of my informants. In a discussion following the tale, Ghāya said: "It is intrinsically valuable, to be given only to its proper owner, the husband." Young men and women engage in a certain amount of mild flirtation which is tolerated, but virginity is most important to protect. *Al-busa tshīh we al-qarṣa trih we al-fāyda kān fi al-ṣaḥīh*, 'the kiss will dry, the bite will fade, but your virginity is most important', Sa'diyya, on that occasion, commented.

At the time I was doing my fieldwork cases of dead babies found in dustbins, wells, or fields were reported in the local press (19/5/1990). I brought up the topic with Ghāya who lives in the area where the infanticides were reported to have happened. Abortion is legal in Tunisia and carried out in hospitals. But fear of being punished by the immediate family for sullyng its honour seems to be the major reason for infanticide.

Ghāya dismissed it as happening not in her neighbourhood - an upper class area - but rather in the poorer quarters around the fringes of La marsa.

The concept of honour and shame as it is presented in the tales is related mainly to the sexual comportment of the women of the family: conservative physical appearance, speech, attitude, sexual behaviour, viewed as sanctioned by Islam. Sexual shame and modesty is more essential to women than to men. In the tales the enforced seclusion and the rules of modesty, shame and respect restrict women's freedom. Many female characters succeed in curbing their desires to such a degree that they conform to the ultimate female ideal of decency/chastity. They submit to the control of the men, their fathers, brothers and husbands and loyally support the family position of honour. The main contribution a woman makes to the honour of the family is by adopting the passive role of colluding in the denial of her own self-expression and preserving her chastity. Many tales reflect these prevailing moral standards and reinforce them.

5.3. A culture of love

Denial of sexuality is not however, the prevailing ethic in some tales. An opposing image emerges from some of the tales, that of the sexually active and assertive woman who disregards gender segregation and rules of modesty and escapes the control of men, as the following examples will demonstrate.

A girl who is not supposed to show an active sexuality asks her father to bring her musk oil to perfume her hair. Rdāḥ (tale S 2), asks her father to bring her musk oil as evidence of his love. This outrages her father, who

takes it as a manifestation of her sexuality and slaps her and leaves, affronted.

No sooner had she uttered this than the king slapped her angrily on the face (tale S2).

Musk oil, considered as an aphrodisiac by Arab tradition, could be smelt for miles around. Ḥmid al-Hilālī falls in love with Rdāḥ on hearing her description and he travels to win her love, but his passion grows when he smells the perfume of her hair.

As he drew closer to Tunis the perfume of musk oil wafted stronger and stronger and Ḥmid's heart throbbed more wildly (tale S2).

Rdāḥ is described walking about her apartment, 'dressed in a fine transparent silk petticoat, letting her long hair hang loose and perfumed with musk oil'. This is a manifestation of Rdāḥ's femininity and sexual awareness as opposed to Sharqat, in 'the Sparkling Maiden' (tale S20), mentioned above, who has to cover her hair and keep it tied back until marriage.

5.3.1. Romantic love/illicit sex

In the tales three women engage in pre-marital sex, the most egregious violation of the modesty code. Rdāḥ escapes her father's control by choosing her marriage partner and disregards the tradition which confers on the father the right of arbitration in a girl's marriage. She falls in love with Ḥmid Al-Hilālī, receives him in her private apartment in spite of the strict surveillance set by her father. She spends three days and three nights

with him in 'marital bliss', then gives him her necklace as a token of her love. Contrary to the merchant's daughter's denial of sexuality, Rdāḥ shows sexual interest. She dresses in such a way as to draw attention to her beauty. She even goes further. She breaks the rule of seclusion, allows a lover in her private apartment and engages in illicit sex. The language of the tales is very 'sexualized'. Dāda describes H'mid al-Ḥilālī on his horse as follows:

shābb m'ankar zīnu m'zankar
taḥta 'ūda tibri fagra
ghzarli ghazra
ma tāgni ṣabra

A proud young man
Whose beauty is unique
Mounting a horse/stick
which would cure the heart's desire
He cast a fatal glance at me
and I was lost/could not resist

The word for horse is the same as stick in Bedouin Arabic. The stick is commonly associated in Tunisia with the male organ. When I asked Sa'diyya what was meant by the stick, she made an obscene gesture showing her forearm.

Al-Hājja Mkāda (tale S3) also falls in love with Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil as soon as she sets eyes on him. She takes a bath perfumed with musk, puts on a fine silk nightgown and invites him into her private apartment and 'they spend three days and three nights together'. The images are again very

'sexualized'. When recounting this episode, Sa'diyya actually imitated love making sounds.

Al-Hājja Mkāda was wandering about in her palace when Dāda came to inform her that Hmid al-Mitjawwil was outside. The princess replied with a smile "He is destined to be my husband. Go to the store-room and make some honey-dough." Dāda hurriedly made the cakes and came back with them to her mistress, who told her "Go and waken this sleeping beauty. Give him these honey cakes and tell him "eat these, and leave, this is not a place for a playboy like you." Dāda went down and wakened Hmid al-Mitjawwal, reporting to him what her mistress had said. He said: *Sallim 'ala lillāk we qullha ma hājtī bi qruṣṣ bil-'asal hājtī bi al-sheykh ḥmūda tīr al-blā la nzil*, 'give my greetings to your mistress and tell her I don't want your pastries; it's a different sort of honey-cake I want!'

Dāda went back to her mistress and told her what he had said. Al-Hājja Mkāda took a quick bath and put on a fine silk seethrough nightgown. As she walked about her apartment the perfume of musk wafted all over the place. She sent Dāda downstairs to ask Hmid al-Mitjawwil to join her in her sleeping chamber. And they spent three days and three nights together.

In 'the Salt-Peddler' (tale S 21), the prince and the princess fall in love and live together seven days and seven nights in, 'marital bliss', *'arūṣa we 'arūṣ*

5.3.2. Marital fidelity

Some tales articulate attitudes and explore relationships and practices that are in contradiction to social norms:

The silk merchant and his neighbour (summary S12)

Once upon a time there was a beautiful young woman who lived near a handsome silk weaver. She went to see him one day to buy a *futa* 'a kind of African wrap'. He offered to weave her the finest gold and silver striped *futa* she had ever seen. Every day the woman dressed herself in her best clothes, made up her face with *khol*, *swāk*, *dabgha* and *harqūş*, perfumed herself and went to sit in the weaver's shop exhibiting gradually her bare face, then her arms, then her thighs.... and watching the weaving in progress.

In this tale a married woman engages in a clear operation of seduction. She uses all the aphrodisiac resources of seduction known to the Arab tradition, *khol*, *swāk*, 'dabgha and *harqūş*, 'eyeliner and beauty spot dye', to seduce her handsome neighbour. She breaks the rule of marital fidelity.

Bāba Turki's wife (summary R5)

Bāba Turki's wife was young and beautiful. She took a lover who used to come and visit her during the day when her husband was at work. One day he came back unexpectedly. Taken aback, his wife hid her lover in an inner room and came to distract her husband's attention telling him about the neighbour's 'unfaithful wife' and how with the help of her sister, she draped a sheet to hide her lover as he made his escape. As she demonstrated with her own sister how it had been done, her lover made his escape.

In this tale too, a married woman is involved in illicit relations. In her enterprise she is helped by her own sister. Women are here markedly seen in a conspiracy against men. The tale points to the tactics of women in support of each other and in co-operation to subvert the code of sexual modesty. The woman expresses the revolt against male control of her body in a form that is legitimate in the women's world. In a discussion of the tale with the narrator and some of her relatives present at the time, the woman's deviant conduct was justified on the grounds that she shouldn't have been married without her own consent, as was the tradition, to an old man who could have been her father. A free union allows a free choice of partner whereas an arranged union does not. Taking a lover, in such a context, is the manifestation of the woman's management of her own body and emotional life.

In yet another tale 'Overpowering Desire' (S28), a woman justifies her infidelity by the fact that she couldn't overcome her *nafs* , 'inner life-force'.

Your father, may he rest in peace, used to travel widely. One day a pedlar came to our house. He was tall and handsome, and as soon as I set eyes on him I was seized with burning passion and desire to lie with him, I have sinned, may God forgive me, *nafsi khānitni*, I could not resist the my *nafs*, 'inner life force' (tale S 28).

Women's sexuality and their emotional needs are affirmed. Sexual adventure is a response to ebullient, rousing desire. In 'Lūlsha' (tale S1), the sultan's wife, as soon as she lifted her eyes to the handsome scribe, was seized with passion and desire and pressed him to accompany her to her sleeping chamber.

The sultan's wife was seized with burning passion and desire as soon as she set eyes on the scribe. She sent him her maid saying: "could you return the passion of one who burns for you." He answered: "I would rather be damned than betray my lord's trust" (tale S1).

In this example we observe a representation of a reversal of the situation more usually presented in the Arab society where sexual initiative is essentially a masculine prerogative. Sex is explored beyond the boundaries of social conventions. Their transgressions are glossed over. According to the usual cultural model, women's immoral actions are inexcusable, but the outcome of these tales shows that for women the standards of the cultural models can be ignored.

5.3.3. The huridan

Fṭayṭma (summary R4)

Once upon a time there was a merchant who married a girl chosen by his mother. He had two sisters who were spoilt and hard to please. The father-in-law of the new bride would have bags full of provisions sent every day. The mother-in-law and her daughters took charge of the kitchen thereby ensuring the best of the provisions for themselves. At dinner time (women used to eat separately from men) they would look for any excuse to send the newly wed bride on pointless errands, while they ate their fill. When asked she would say "oh yes, I've had enough to eat, *al-ḥamdullah*, despite her hunger.

The young bride grew thinner and more listless every day, but she was a girl of great modesty, she never complained to her husband or her family. Her husband noticed she was pale and subdued. He reported it to an old fellow merchant who said: "*lāzim ji'āna*", 'she is not eating enough.' Surprised, the

husband explained that there was plenty of food prepared every day. The old man suggested he should put her to the test. The test proved that the man's wife was hungry. So he decided to teach his mother and sisters a lesson.

He pretended to have an argument with his wife and sent her back to her father's house. A week later, he asked his mother to go and ask for the hand of the neighbour's daughter Fṭayṭma. The mother and her two daughters went next-door. They were received by Fṭayṭma as her parents were out. They were shocked by her *qbāḥa we fṣāṣa*, 'arrogance and callousness'. When Fṭayṭma broke wind, it was the last straw; the women were about to leave affronted, but did not want to displease the young man and went on with the marriage arrangement.

The first day Fṭayṭma came to their house, she took charge of the kitchen. She would pick out the best of the provisions and eat while the others watched. At dinner, when asked to bring the salt or some water, she would answer: *barra zammir, manīsh khdīma 'andkum*, 'you can whistle for it, I'm not your maid', and found any excuse to send her mother or sister-in-law in turn to run errands. One day the women decided to go to the baths, and asked Fṭayṭma to prepare for them a nice *mḥammaṣ*, 'thick semolina soup', for their return. Fṭayṭma used the whole year's provision of *mḥammaṣ*. Outraged, the mother complained to her son but he told them he was not prepared to hear any word of complaint against his wife.

On another day the women went out to pay a visit to the shrine of the local saint Sidi Belhassen and asked Fṭayṭma to look after her sick father-in-law. Fṭayṭma seized her father-in-law and cut off his tongue. She then called two notaries to draw up his will. When the notaries came, she tempted them with her body, showing her bare arms, legs and thighs. When they began to write the will the father-in-law was unable to object.

The women came back and discovered the tragedy. Shocked, they begged the young man: *tallaq 'alīna ha al-mahbūla we rajja' martik we aḥna*

nikhdmūha, 'divorce the wild insane Fṭayṭma and take back your former wife and we will gladly serve her'.

The language and the conduct of Fṭayṭma are the antithesis of the dominant cultural norms of virtuous modest womanhood. Fṭayṭma is abusive, arrogant, extremely shameless and breaks all taboos. She takes aggressive action to survive. Her behaviour is necessary for her own security, otherwise she would die of hunger. Her licence and non-conformity to the rules of 'normal' behaviour for women earn her the stigma of 'insanity'. Her revolt against the in-laws and her self-assertiveness incurs disapproval but wins her freedom in the end. She refuses to be selfless and acts on her own initiative. In short she is a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her. The fact that Fṭayṭma has chosen to cut out her father-in-law's tongue is very significant. She attempts to usurp speech by cutting out the tongue of the patriarchal tyrant. In her enterprise she is helped by her young husband. This could not have been done without his complicity/conspiracy. Out of love and concern for his first bride, he sets out to defy the traditional attitude of his mother and takes an active role in redressing the wrong, changing the status-quo and reversing the traditional role. He decides to choose his new bride and robs his mother of her power and respectability as mother-in-law.

Fṭayṭma is a widespread and popular stereotype. The name Fṭayṭma is currently given to any woman who is outspoken and does not conform.

The narrator Ghāya thoroughly enjoyed the telling of this story. She took delight in expressing Fṭayṭma's plan of revenge. In her vengeful actions, Fṭayṭma avenges not only herself and the young woman who preceded her, but, for Ghāya, represents all the Tunisian women who have had to suffer similar situations. The narrator is digging into the past and recounting an

episode from her young adulthood. Having herself undergone the same injustice, she is enjoying her own fantasies, since as Bouhdiba pointed out, *L'imaginaire est une forme de souvenir*, 'imagination is a form of remembrance' (Bouhdiba 1977: 46).

5.4. A laughing sub-culture

As demonstrated above the subversion of dominant moral positions and sexual hierarchy is a common theme in the tales told among women. This is also reflected in their humour as the following example illustrates:

The innocent virgin (summary S14)

Once upon a time there was a man who wanted to marry an innocent virgin with no sexual knowledge. So he sought the help of the local *khāṭba*, 'matchmaker'. One day she came and told him: "I have found the one you are looking for. Her father, out of concern for her seclusion, has used the 'seven locks'". Delighted, the man went to ask for the daughter's hand. Her father agreed to marry her to him and they came to an agreement.

On the wedding night, after they were alone in the bridal chamber the man, wanting to test her innocence, asked her the following question: "Do you know what this is?" exposing himself to her.

"Oh! yes ", she answered. " It is a cock! "

Appalled, the man sent her back in shame the very same night to her father's house.

A week later he called the same matchmaker and asked her to find him a completely innocent virgin. When asked the same ritual question, the new bride gave the same answer as the first one. She was repudiated too.

The third bride answered: "I don't know" to the question which was put to her likewise to test her innocence. The man was delighted. "This is the one I am looking for, I must be gentle with her", he thought to himself. That night the marriage was not consummated. Three days later, he said to her: "I'll teach you what this is", pointing down to that which was between his thighs, "this is a cock!". "Is that what you call a cock!" she answered scornfully. "My paternal cousin's *wild 'ammi*, is this big!" showing her forearm, "my maternal cousin's, *wild khāli*, is this big, my neighbour's is this big....."

Fṭayṭma in the previous tale is the reverse of 'the ideal'; the attitude of this girl constitutes a subversion of 'the ideal' through humour which is directed against men. The beginning of the story could have been the framework of a conventional story except for the language which indicates that it is not. But the twist at the end subverts the initial framework. The tale, however, does not, nor does it posit that there are no women virgins; it is simply taking a mainstream cultural belief and subverting it. It allows sexuality traits that are socially taboo for women. In this example, the mainstream cultural notion that promiscuity is a male prerogative and that girls should be chaste is reversed: the 'chaste' young bride not only is not, but questions the man's sexual adequacy. It is a common thing that women, to ridicule men, talk about their sexual inadequacy. This tale portrays an example of humour that ridicules mainstream cultural notions and targets men as the butts of the joke. This pattern of a female protagonist and a male victim is recurrent in the humorous tales in the present collection, (tales R5, S16, 17).

The woman with two (S16)

There was a man who wanted to marry a woman with two. Every time he sent to ask for the hand of a girl, he made it a condition that she must have two. All the girls replied that they had only one, and so they were not eligible for marriage. There was a cunning young girl who heard about the man and decided to trick him. "I have two" she said. And so the marriage was celebrated.

It was customary for the young bride to be prepared for her wedding by a *ḥannāna*, who would tint the bride's hair and hands with henna and shave off all her body hair. This girl had asked the *ḥannāna* to leave half of her pubic hair unshaved. On the wedding night the marriage was consummated, but the bride allowed the bridegroom to see only half her body, and saved the rest for later.

One day the husband informed his bride that he was leaving on business and that he wanted to take the spare one with him to play with! The young bride said "Of course!" Before he left, she caught a bird, put it in a tin, and gave it to him, and told him to be careful with it. Delighted, the husband set off with the tin in his pocket.

One evening, he felt horny and reached for the tin in his pocket. "It's always useful", he thought, "to have two." And he opened the tin. The bird flew away. He ran after it, but eventually had to give up. In the meantime, the young bride shaved the rest of her pubic hair. Soon the husband came back, saying "Something horrible has happened. I've lost the spare one." The girl shouted "How awful! I told you to be careful." He answered, "Thank God you've still got one left." And they enjoyed the newly-shaved one together.

The woman with three (S17)

There was a man who wanted to marry a woman with three. Every time he sent to ask for the hand of a girl, he made it a condition that she must have three. All the girls replied that they had only one, and so they were not eligible for

marriage. There was a cunning young girl who heard about the man and decided to trick him. "I have three" she said. And so the marriage was celebrated. It was customary for the young bride to be prepared for her wedding by a *ḥannāna*, who would tint the bride's hair and hands with henna and shave off all her body hair. This girl had asked the *ḥannāna* to leave all of her pubic hair unshaved. On the wedding night the marriage was consummated. "What is your first one called?" the bridegroom asked her. *al-mghafghaf*, 'The bushy one', she replied. They enjoyed the bushy one for weeks and weeks, until he felt like a change. "Let's have the other one" he said to her, "tonight". The young bride had her pubic hair removed, leaving a single tuft of hair. That night, they enjoyed the new one. "What is your second one called?" her husband asked. *bū quṣṣa*, 'the one with the fringe', she replied. Again, they enjoyed the one with the fringe for weeks, until he felt like a change. "Let's enjoy your third one tonight", he suggested. That day the young bride had her pubic hair all removed. That night they enjoyed the newly-shaved one. "What do you call this one?" he asked jokingly. *Al-fartāṣ*, 'the bald one', she answered. "I think I like it best." And they enjoyed the bald one from then on.

5.5. Concluding remarks

These humorous examples provide a vision of a laughing sub-culture. Female humour in this context is largely anti-male and impels women to laugh together at the expense of men and glorify their strength and intelligence. White (1988) speaks about the nature of female humour as follows:

Humour provides an outlet and a method for responding to the cultural oppression of women, by ridiculing and reversing those cultural forces that seek to deprive women (White 1989: 88).

The political use of humour especially as a mechanism for social change and for cultural expression is common place. Clinton (1982) stresses that feminist humour exposes the sources of imbalance and attempts to eradicate them. According to Clinton, because feminist humour sheds light on women's oppression and points out the need for its elimination, it functions as a source for cultural and political change.

In a society which is highly conservative and authoritarian in its social and sexual code, which breeds repression, and crushes women under the burden of honour and shame, it is only normal that women develop an alternative consciousness to subvert the system. The very fact of using overtly sexual language is subversive. While not totally rejecting the system which oppresses them, women have nevertheless developed their own parallel set of values/subculture which allows them to express their own aspirations, desires and needs, and make fun of the male domination of their society, their household and their selves.

CHAPTER SIX: FATE

6.1 Introduction

al-Maktūb 'al-jibīn lāzim tshūfu al-'īn

‘What is written on the forehead the eyes should see’

Proverb (tale K5)

Every one who reads this Tunisian proverb will be impressed by its fatalistic tone. Indeed it is commonly held that the Muslim attitude in general to human life is fatalistic, and this may be true where modern popular Islam is concerned, at least if we take fatalism in the wider sense of the conviction that all things are subject to predestination.

Many instances of this popular Muslim attitude can be seen in the material under study, where it is often stated that this or that event occurred 'according to Allāh's Decree', or 'as it was ordained'.

A study of this idea within popular thought will be presented based on selected tales. To this end, it is necessary to classify the many statements concerning Fate in the tales, in order to give some sort of systematic account of the fatalism that is professed by the narrators.

6.2. Expressions of fate

The different words and expressions that are used to express the idea of Lot, Fate, Fortune, Destiny can be classified in three categories:

- 1- words expressing Time/Fate, *Dahr/Ayyām*
- 2- words for lot, fortune, *Bakht/Sa'd, Qasm*

3- terms expressing generally the idea of predetermined decision such as *Qaḍa* and *Qadar*; 'Decree, Decision', *Qudrat Allāh*, 'God's will, *Hukum Allāh* , 'God's command', *Maktūb*, 'written destiny'.

This chapter discusses the interrelation between these concepts/ categories and relates their use in the tales to their use in religious thought more generally. A further dimension to their use in the tales is the attitude of the people towards destiny: a standard position of patience and resignation in the face of the world's vicissitudes, as a way to rationalize the incomprehensible, to master the world and reduce it to manageable dimensions.

6.2.1. *Dahr/Ayyām*

The word for Time/Fate, *Dahr*, occurs only a few times. But on the occasions it is used (tale S4; R3), it is easy to understand that it has the sense of evil time, meaning misfortune or affliction.

Time/Fate is hostile to man. Its hostility manifests itself in misfortunes. Time/Fate is treacherous, no one can rely on it. On learning about her unexpected misfortune, a woman breaks out in lament: "Time/Fate is fickle, *al-Dahr ghaddār*, why does it bear hostility to me" (tale K1).

On that occasion the narrator Khīra makes the following comment: "No one knows what *al-Dahr* has in store for us" (tale K1).

The impression is given that the blows of *al-Dahr* strike man without plan or meaning, and the outcome is inevitable. On the other hand, there are other instances that seem to presuppose a rationale for the actions of

Time/Fate: it produces retribution. The following tales will demonstrate this.

Qāsim we Qwīsim, 'little Qāsim' (summary R3)

Once upon a time there was a shoemaker called Qāsim who was commissioned by the king to make a hundred pairs of shoes overnight and bring them the following day to the palace, otherwise he would be beheaded.

Before sunset, Qāsim sat inside his shop eating his dinner sent by his mother as usual, lamenting over his misfortune and imminent death. As soon as he opened his mouth to eat, the wall split apart and there appeared an angel in the form of a young maiden who asked him to give her his dinner, and in exchange she would make him the hundred pairs of shoes required by the king. Overjoyed, Qāsim acquiesced. Soon the maiden started the job and he went to bed reassured. On rising the following day, he found the shoes ready. He hastily took them to the king who was amazed at the speed and the meticulousness with which the work was done and gave him two purses of gold. From then on, the maiden would appear every evening at the same hour to eat Qāsim's dinner and make him a hundred pair of shoes in exchange. Soon Qāsim gained prosperity, and *zhāt lu al-ayyām*, 'the days smiled to him', and he became very rich. His fellow tradesmen soon noticed his sudden prosperity and inquired about the secret. Qāsim related to them what was happening, and they became very jealous and advised him to refuse her dinner next time she appeared on the grounds that "He who takes your *qasm*, 'destined share' wants certainly to take away your life". Qāsim did as he was told, and the maiden disappeared. He waited for her the following evenings, but she never came back again. He soon lost all his fortune and *al-dahr ḍarbu ḍarba qāsiya*, 'Destiny struck him cruelly' and he became poor again".

The Muezzin(summary S4)

Once upon a time there was a pious muezzin who used to make a living calling people to prayer. One day as he was calling people for the morning prayer, a dove flew down and settled on his shoulder. He stroked her gently, but soon the dove picked him up in her beak and flew off to a distant land. On arrival, the dove changed into a beautiful maiden and advised him that she had made him the king of that land in place of her recently deceased husband. The muezzin thanked Allāh the merciful for his *qasm*, 'alloted share', and lived for years treated with the love and respect due to a king. One day the queen discovered that he was not faithful to her any more. She confronted him with it, and he justified it on the grounds that she had become too old for him. Aggrieved, and hurt in her pride, she changed him back to a muezzin and blew him off to his original place. And *al-dahr dār 'alīh*, 'destiny turned against him'. When he realized his change of fortune, he regretted it, and stood days on end waiting for the dove to come back.

In these instances *al-Dahr*, appears, as it were, the representative, or the very substance of the moral order. But here fortune and its absence is conceived of as the manifestation of God's will; it is sent by him as punishment or reward for man's deeds. *Al-dahr* struck the ungrateful Qāsim cruelly, *al-dahr ḍarbu ḍarba qāsiya*, and turned against the unfaithful muezzin, *al-dahr dār 'alīh*. Here there is the suggestion that predestination allows for human agency and that destiny is not morally indifferent: both men have been in a way the cause of their own misfortune. *al-dahr*, then here acts according to the principle of retribution. In other words, one can choose, and the choice made determines one's destiny.

A related word to the concept of *al-dahr*, is *al-ayyām* meaning days. The success of Qāsim is described as resulting from the fact that *al-ayyām zhāt lu*, 'the days smile upon him', while adversity and misfortune mean that *al-dahr*, turns its back on the muezzin.

6.2.2. Bakht/ Sa'd/Qasm

The second group of expressions comprises two words which can be used almost interchangeably, *Bakht* and *Sa'd*. Underlyingly they mean something that is assigned or allotted, "lot, fortune", but very often it denotes a "good fate", thus "good fortune, luck".

A good instance of *bakht* is found in the words of the old woman's daughters when talking about their younger and happily married sister:

'andha al-Bakht rabbi 'atāha,

She is lucky God willed it (tale R13).

The younger sister is married and contented. The elder ones are not. The inequality is attributed to God's will, therefore it is a matter of fact rather than speculation.

There is a common conception of Fortune, *Sa'd*, as being either sleeping or wakeful. In the same tale, the young sister is described as a leisured wife with *sab'a khayrāt*, 'seven riches', numerous servants and *sa'd dīma wāqif*, 'an ever wakeful fortune'. Awake, *al-Sa'd* is like a guardian spirit which protects man and gives all good things. Tunisian popular culture personifies fortune as a black slave, a sort of a guardian spirit, protecting and giving all good things. In discussing the concept with

informants, it became clear that it extends to the fact that if someone has a dream in which there appears a black slave, it is interpreted as an omen of good luck, a guardian spirit. Tunisian popular belief has it that *al-Sa'd*, 'good fortune', is a tall slave who now stands erect on his feet, now lies dormant, hence the ups and downs that punctuate our lives.

The sense of allotted share is more apparent in *qasm*, a related term meaning, 'allotted share, portion'. It appears in the two tales cited above. The first tale is entitled 'Qāsim and Qwīsim', meaning 'he who allots' and 'little share'. These, as well as the word *qasm*, 'allotted share' are derived from the root Q.S.M, meaning 'to allot', which is significantly recurrent throughout the tale because it is represented in the name of the main character. The resulting pun in Arabic reinforces the impact of the tale. *Qasm* is very commonly used to mean man's allotted share. In this tale it appears in the form of a daily share of bread and food. In 'the sparkling maiden' (tale S20), it is used differently. In one case it refers to a small fortune, in the other a larger fortune. The tale is about two merchants. One is described as 'rich and prosperous', the other as 'poor and humble'. Each has received his 'God's allotted *qasm*', the narrator comments. Being attributed to God's will, the inequality between the two men's wealth is not questioned. The expression 'God's *qasm*', legitimates the unequal distribution of social honour.

The third category comprises *Qadā* and *Qadar*; *Qudrat Allāh*; *Hukm Allāh*; *Maktūb*; various expressions for Destiny which are used almost without distinction.

6.2.3. *Qadā* and *Qadar*

There are a few instances of the expression *Qadā* and *Qadar*, 'Decree/Fate', which refer to God's Decree concerning predestination.

Qadā rarely occurs alone, in most cases *Qadā* and *Qadar* is used as a single phrase. The terms are used interchangeably without any difference in meaning. In all cases a misfortune is involved, i.e. death, calamity.

Qadā, occurs alone on three occasions (S5, S9; K2). Again in all cases a question of misfortune is involved as will be shown in the following examples.

In 'Walha and 'Aysha' (tale S5), 'Aysha is given in marriage to a Jew who was able to satisfy her father's greed for money. She breaks out in lament: "Such is the fate, *Qadā* that God has inflicted on me", and Sa'diyya adds: "What could she do? Such is the *Qadā* God had ordained for her." To contract marriage with a Jew is frowned upon and considered a blasphemy unless he embraces Islam. 'Aysha has to give in to her father's demands and accept the Jew as ordained by God.

In 'Aysha the Fisherman's Daughter' (tale S9), on the death of his wife, the fisherman addresses his young daughter resignedly: "Such is the Fate *Qadā* that God has decreed."

Here the reference is to death which is sent by God. Death as predestined by God will be discussed later.

In 'Companionship' (tale K2), a young princess is predestined to become a bird, a stone and an ogress for a year each. On relating her past three-year misfortune to her husband, he says: *la māni'a lima qadā Allāh*, 'no

power can withhold what God ordains'. In fact this statement is a quotation from the Ḥadīth tradition. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol8: 399).

Instances of the combination of the two are found in the tales 'You who rebel against Fate, rise and face what God has ordained' (tale K1), and al-*Qudra*, 'fate' (tale K5), two narratives relating the predestined misfortune of two women. In the first tale, *Qaḍā* and *Qadar* refers to death. Neighbours came to express their sympathy to their fellow neighbour whose wife had just died saying: "*Hātha Qaḍā we Qadar* " In the second it refers to a misfortune: predestined involvement in illicit sex; despite strict surveillance a young girl engages in an illicit relationship with a man and bears him a child.

The dictionary gives the following meaning to *Qāḍa*: judgement, decision. On the basis of the Qu'rān, the word *Qaḍā* can be understood as 'God's eternal Decision or Decree' concerning all things:

LXXXVII- He who established the Fate, *Qaḍā*, of men and directed them to the straight road (Arberry 1982: 615).

The root Q.D.R. has the general sense of to determine, to establish, to decree. In one passage of the Qu'rān, *Qadar*, also means Decree, or destiny, viz Surah XCVII, which itself is entitled *Laylat al-Qadar*, 'night of the Decree'.

LXXXVII- Magnify the name of God the lord, the most high, who created and shaped, who determined, *Qaddara* and guided (Arberry 1982: 641).

In its technical sense *Qaḍā* and *Qadar* therefore designate the Divine Decree in so far as it sets the fixed limits of each thing. There are a great number of Ḥadīths on the subject of *Qaḍā* and *Qadar* (cf. *kitāb al-Qadar* in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*).

And the command of Allāh is *qadaran maqdūr*, 'a decree determined' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*, Vol 8: 390).

On the question of *Qaḍā* and *Qadar*, Ringgren writes:

Orthodox Islamic theology contends that *Qaḍā* is the Decree existing in God's mind for all eternity, *Qadar* the execution and declaration of the Decree at the appointed time. But this distinction seems rather artificial and probably had no real existence outside the mind of the systematizing scholars of Islamic theology (Ringgren 1957: 105).

Tunisian popular thought as expressed in the tales uses the two expressions interchangeably, making no clear distinction between them, with the overall meaning of the Decree of God, fixed fate/misfortune.

6.2.4. *Qudrat Allāh/Hukm Allāh*

Qudrat Allāh, 'God's will' (tale K5); *Hukm Allāh*, 'God's command/order' (tale S 21) are synonymous expressions with *qaḍā* and *qadar* and most often used in the tales to refer to a predestined misfortune.

6.2.5. al-Maktūb

Maktūb, the most common word for Fate, has rich layers of meaning. Its derivation is K.T.B. meaning originally in Arabic 'to write'. The term is used in the passive form to indicate that something is determined, or assigned, literally 'written'. This particular expression has an extra dimension. The written word carries authority among Tunisians. It has sacred potency. Much of its power comes from its association with the Qur'ān. It is believed that all things that happen were known to God right from the beginning and that "the pen dried after writing what man will encounter" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1971: 398). *Maktūb* primarily denotes the share of destiny assigned to each man: his material situation, the duration of his life, but just like *Qudrat Allāh*, *Ḥukm Allāh* and *qadā* and *qadar*, it is most often used in a more special sense, namely 'misfortune', as the following tales will demonstrate.

The Prophet Suleymān and the Griffon (Summary K6).

When birds could talk, the Prophet Suleymān discussed *al-Maktūb* 'Fate' with a griffon insisting that God's will must always triumph. The griffon denied it. The prophet informed her that the wife of so and so was going to bear a daughter who was destined to marry the prince so and so and nobody would know. The griffon said she would prevent it from happening.

When the girl was born, the griffon stole her and travelled with her to settle in a far away land. She fed her until she turned fifteen.

In a far away land a king's son fell ill. All the physicians were summoned to heal the prince to no avail. A bedouin sage advised his father to send him on a voyage for a change of scene. The prince took ship with a few companions. One stormy night the ship was tossed on to the shore. The prince decided to

explore the island unaccompanied. It was in fact where the griffon had taken refuge. He saw the girl and they soon took to each other. She invited him to stay with her and hid him out of the griffon's sight.

Since the prophet was omniscient he knew that the girl was now carrying a child. He called the griffon and asked her to bring the girl before him. When the griffon realized what had happened, she shrieked, flew away and never came back to earth again. *Al-Maktūb*, *maktūb*, 'what is written, shall be.'

You who rebel against fate, rise and face what God has ordained for you
(Summary K1)

Once upon a time there was a merchant who was married to his cousin and through Allāh's will they lived happily. But their happiness was not complete: al-Maktūb had other plans for them. In her sleep she would heave a deep sigh of unhappiness. This discomfited the husband and he could not understand the mystery as he never failed to see to her well being. He confided his anxieties to a venerable elderly jeweller who helped him unravel the mystery: his wife was predestined to be a beggar, a thief, and a prostitute, each for a year. This saddened the husband but he decided to reveal the secret to her. On hearing about her ordained misfortune, the wife decided to take her own life rather than disgrace her husband and family. She cut her throat, but she did not die, "her hour had not yet come." When she was discovered, she was thought dead, so she was washed, laid down and buried. But soon after everybody left she heard a voice ordering her to rise and face what God has ordained for her. She rose from her grave and as she was hungry made her way to the cemetery gate and started to beg. She begged for a year, then turned to stealing. She did it for a year and finally became a singer and prostitute. The husband, pressured by his kin not to rebel against God's will, decided to remarry. As she was famous and in great demand, his ex-wife was hired to entertain the guests at his

wedding. When she came to the house she recognized her husband and house and she sang an improvised verse relating her story. Her husband understood the message and recognized his wife. He cancelled his marriage with the new bride and took his cousin back.

The two stories exemplify clearly the working of *al-Maktūb*. The first one is rounded off by the griffon being given indisputable proof of *al-Maktūb*'s amazing interventions in human lives. The topic of destiny is the subject of conversation. While the griffon maintains that caution can prevent misfortune, *al-Ḥadhar yighlib al-Qadar*, in other words, that one can choose, the prophet maintains that no human effort can alter what is pre-ordained by God. They agree to carry out an experiment on a girl who is predestined to bear a child from a secret marriage. The predestined moment of her fall has come and the bird fails to stop it in spite of her extreme cautiousness, *hbat 'alīha ḥijāb al-ghafla*, 'a veil of distraction descended over her'.

This religious legend reflects a common belief that an omnipotent God with supreme power determines or has even determined in advance man's destiny, and that any attempt to escape is pointless.

Deterministic and fatalistic ideas are also very clearly expressed in the second tale. Just like the griffon, the central character rebels against her *maktūb*, and struggles to prevent it, but she cannot. She tries to take her own life rather than disgrace her husband, but her impulse to flee from her destiny is frustrated: "her hour has not yet come". In her attempt to escape her destiny, she does not cut her throat properly, an enterprise which is equally prescribed by fate, and she is helplessly delivered into the hands of Fate.

The power of fate is irresistible, and no one can escape it no matter how hard he struggles. There could be but one result: one must succumb to *al-Maktūb*, and follow where it leads. In both examples a moment of resistance to fate is portrayed, when an attempt is made to control the future, in other words to choose, but the outcome is inevitable. The main idea that is alluded to is that 'what is written shall be', man will not escape his fate be it death or other misfortune. The phrase is used repeatedly in the full text of the tales even though that is not rendered in these summaries.

In the Muslim cultural heritage, the idea of *Maktūb* and references to the theological Doctrine of Predestination can be found in abundance.

The idea that every thing that happens in the world is written is dwelt upon in the Qur'ān and several traditions.

LIV- And everything, great and small is inscribed (Arberry 1982: 555).

Nothing shall ever befall us except what Allāh has ordained, *kataba*, for us (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol 8: 402).

That man's Fate is written on his forehead, seems to be a very widespread idea, and oral tradition and the Arabian Nights contain specimens of this popular theology.

In Bukhari's Ṣaḥīḥ, translated by De Vlieger, (cited by Ringgren 1957: 120), it is stated that the angel writes for instance on his forehead or on his head. This statement is compared with the proverb: "What is written on the forehead, the eyes should see." Another group of traditions concerns the writing of man's destiny when he is an embryo in his mother's womb. The things that are written down are, his sex, his sustenance, his work and

his term of life, which count as part of man's destiny in general (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim IV, Bāb al-Qadar: 1391-92).

In the corpus there is strong evidence that the Qur'ān and the traditions of Ḥadīth, constitute the primary sources from which the narrators draw their inspiration particularly Khīra whose father had an intimate knowledge with the whole range of the Prophet's oral traditions.

6.3. Occasions when fate intervenes

There are certain occasions on which typically fate takes a hand. The idea of predestination is clear in the following tale which tells us that whatever good fortune and misfortune human life contains, its major events and its final end in death are conceived as predestined, *maktūb* 'al-jibīn, 'written on the forehead' by *al-Qudra*, 'Fate' (tale K5), whose agents are two angels carrying out the decree of the writing.

Fate (summary K5)

Once upon a time there was a chief of a tribe who was married to a barren woman. He always yearned for a child who would fill his house with joy, until God willed that his wife would bear him a child. One day she went into labour and gave birth to a girl as beautiful as the moon. The chief of the tribe had a brother who had a son who was twenty years of age, and tradition had it that he would marry his cousin. The son was not prepared to marry a much younger wife. He was a thief and he decided to bide his time and steal something from his uncle's house. As he was doing so, he saw two men make their way into the house. He hid in a corner and stood watching. The

two men took the girl between them and talked. One of them asked: "what should we call her?"

The other answered: *Wāfīt-al-Šīt*, 'Beauty'. He wrote it on her forehead.

"What is her term of life?"

"Such and such"

"Who is her destined husband?"

"She would take that man, (pointing in the direction of the cousin), as her legitimate husband, and another one as a lover"

They wrote it all on her forehead, put the baby back in the cot and left. Taken aback by what he heard, he decided to kill the baby rather than disgrace himself by marrying an adulterous wife. He cut the baby into two and sneaked out of the house. To his surprise the news of her death did not reach him, and the baby was discovered safe and sound. He remembered what he had overheard and hastened to take a wife. A few years later, he decided to travel to the city and find a job.

The girl was brought up spoilt and pampered, and many suitors came to ask for her hand. But her father said he would not marry her to an outsider. The son was summoned by his father and ordered to marry his cousin. He could only accept, and he decided to watch her carefully. She was young and beautiful and she caught people's attention wherever she went. To drive her admirers off, she told them she had a lover who was the king of Egypt, but they did not believe her. So one of them decided to go and find out by himself. He arrived in Egypt on the 'Aid day, a religious feast following the month of fast. So he asked for permission to pay his respects to the king privately on that occasion, which he did, then asked him about the girl from their village. The king confirmed it and warned him and all the young men of his village to leave her alone.

Charmed by the idea of a young bedouin falling in love with him, the king decided to travel and meet the girl. When he came to the village, he sought the

help of a shepherd to take him to the girl's house. The husband happened to be away that night on the occasion of the birth of his child from his first wife. But in the middle of the night, he remembered and came back to check on her. He found her with her lover. So he tied a rope around their feet and went to call her father and make a scandal. To his surprise, when he came back with her father, the man was nowhere to be seen and his own son was tied instead. A few months had passed and the husband still couldn't forget the incident. So he decided to travel to Egypt and find out by himself. When he saw the king he remembered his face and asked permission to see him. He related to him the story of the two angels and his wife's destiny. Then he asked him if he really was the man he saw a few months ago in his wife's bed. The king confirmed it and explained that that was what God had ordained and since he knew from the beginning it was pointless to investigate. The husband admitted that he struggled to prevent it from happening, but God's will was stronger. And so "what was written on the forehead the eyes saw", the narrator concluded.

A strong belief in the absolute power of Fate and the futility of any human effort to escape it is again clearly stated in this tale. We get a vivid impression of Fate as the omnipotent power ruling over major events in human life.

In the beginning we are presented with a childless couple yearning for a child until 'God willed that she should bear him a child', *ḥatta rabbi ktib laha we ḥablit*. The baby is destined to be a girl. Then the hour of the Decree came and two angels in human form wrote the girl's destiny on her forehead, her name, her term of life, her destined husband and her fall.

Throughout the narrative, we follow the destined husband's useless efforts to prevent that which was written for him and for her from

happening. On hearing his cousin's Maktūb, he is stirred into immediate action: he takes a wife and travels to Tunis to escape, but a few years later he is ordered by his father to come back to the village and take his cousin as a second wife. He accepts and decides to take all precaution to prevent her from disgracing him and her tribe by taking a lover, but Destiny dictates that his first wife should go into labour and he would have to be with her and provide an opportunity for his wife to commit adultery. But this enterprise itself is equally prescribed and governed by fate. The lover's decision to come and conquer is also the effect of some pre-ordained plan of fate. Its end is never open to doubt: it is clear from the beginning that the village girl, simply awaits his coming which will fulfill her destiny too. The occurrence of every event is inevitable, ineluctable. Khīra concludes: *illi maktūb 'al-jibin shafittu al-'īn*, 'what was written on the forehead, the eyes saw'. Thus destiny, *al-Qudra*, must take its course.

In the corpus interventions by *al-Maktūb* occur at the crucial points in the individual's life: birth, marriage and death.

6.3.1. Birth

Rabbi ktib laha we ḥablit, 'God willed it and she conceived' (tale S7), is a very common expression, or, *rabbi 'aṭāhum*, 'God granted them' a boy (tale S3), a girl (tale S2), seven boys and a girl (tale S11). On the occasion of their seventh baby daughter, to comfort her angry husband a woman exclaims: "God willed it for us, what can we do!" (tale K3).

The child's birth day and hour is also the effect of a pre-ordained plan of fate: "On the night God willed, her hour came and Ṣābra went into labour" (tale R1).

6.3.2. Love/marriage

There are various stories in which the plot centres around a loving couple, but fundamentally they are destiny stories. The interest is not focused on sentiment and the kind of love described is not founded on personal choice. In most cases the hero's decision to conquer a princess whose fame reaches him, is the effect of some pre-ordained plan of action, 'Rdāḥ' (tale S2), 'the Salt Peddler' (tale S21), 'Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil' (tale S3).

Rdāḥ (Summary S2)

Once upon a time there was a childless king who always prayed to God to have a child. One day an angel appeared in his dream and asked him if he wanted, *tufla bi al-miḥna wi t'ish wella tful bi al-miḥna we yimūt*, 'a girl who would suffer misfortune but survive, or a son with a misfortune, who dies'. The king ignored the angel and went back to sleep, but the angel appeared again to ask the same question. Noticing his agitation, his wife enquired what was wrong and he related to her what he had seen. She advised him to ask for a girl, after all with money and power they could overcome any misfortune, *muṣība*. So, God willed it that she should bear a baby girl. Nine months later a beautiful baby daughter was born. They gave her the name of Rdāḥ. The king had a glass palace built for her to prevent the predestined misfortune from befalling her.

Rdāḥ grew up in the palace knowing no one but her parents the king and the queen and her maid Dāda. One day the maid fell ill and Rdāḥ had to see to her own needs: she had to eat the meat off the bone. To extract the marrow she tapped it on the floor which broke. For the first time she saw the outside world through the hole. She saw an old bedouin woman crying, and asked her what was wrong. When she saw the princess, the bedouin marvelled at her beauty

and asked her to come up and visit her. On seeing her long and beautiful hair she advised her to perfume it with musk oil. On the following occasion her father visited her, she asked him for musk oil.

After some hesitation, he sent his vizier to fetch it. The rumours of Rdāḥ's beauty reached Ḥmid al-Hilālī from the tribe of Beni Hilāl and he set off to conquer her love. On his way he met with a group of bedouin singers. He stopped to enquire about Rdāḥ's place. Offering her daughter, a bedouin woman warned him that his enterprise was dangerous and that an evil fortune must have sent him. But Ḥmid persevered. A second group of singers gave him the same kind of warning, but he ignored it and continued his way.

As he drew closer to Tunis, the smell of Rdāḥ's perfumed hair grew stronger. He arrived in Tunis. A Jewish shoemaker directed him to Rdāḥ's palace and warned him to be careful as the king set a guard around the palace.

Rdāḥ's maid Dāda, was sent to fetch some water from the spring outside the palace. She saw the handsome knight and went to report it to her mistress. Rdāḥ wrapped herself in her veil and went down to see for herself. Ḥmid saw her and proposed but Rdāḥ refused his offer. He persisted in wooing her until he had overcome her resistance and won her love. She eventually invited him to her apartment. They spent three days and three nights together. On the third day, she gave him her necklace as a token of her troth and sent him to see her father.

Ḥmid al-Hilālī took the necklace and travelled with it to the village, where he had to settle some tribal affairs. So he gave the necklace to his cousin and told her to send 'Ammār and Khelifa, his sharecroppers, to go and ask the king for Rdāḥ on his behalf.

'Ammār and Khelifa set off for Tunis. When they arrived they asked permission to see the king. When they came before him, they gave him Rdāḥ's necklace.

Outraged to see his daughter give her token of betrothal to bedouins, he gave orders to throw her out, dispossessed of all her riches.

The two men took her and on the way each took turn in abusing her. The sun was scorching. So Rdāḥ got sunstroke. By the time they arrived in the village, Rdāḥ was dying. On her death bed, Rdāḥ expressed to Ḥmid's cousin her grief at what had happened and breathed her last.

The rumour of Rdāḥ's death reached Ḥmid al-Hilālī. His cousin got him a new bride ready in Rdāḥ's place. But when Ḥmid came back, he found out the truth and in his turn died of sorrow.

The love theme is rather a *Maktūb* theme. The love between Ḥmid and Rdāḥ is destined. The hero is destined to fall in love with Rdāḥ on hearing her praised. Ḥmid greets Rdāḥ saying: "I was destined to come to woo you."

He travels to conquer her, stirred by his passion and insists on going on a perilous adventure, a bedouin woman warns him: "An evil fate has driven you all the way."

Rdāḥ refuses his advances but he persists in wooing her until he has overcome her resistance only because she was destined for him.

idha yijībik al-Maktūb lidayy ḥatta tkūn shāddāt trūm

If destiny delivers you into my hands, even if you resist, you are bound to give in (tale S2).

But then Destiny decides otherwise, and they are separated and die of sorrow. Sa'diyya comments, *al-maktūb jma'hum we al-maktūb farraqhum*, 'destiny united them and separated them'.

The tale of 'the Salt Peddler' (tale S21), is of fate recognized and accepted. Fate intervenes to allow a young couple to meet and fall in love. Their final separation is also part of Fate's plan. Far from rebelling, they willingly submit to their destiny. They will not, or they cannot, fight for their love. They complain of their separation that *Hukm Allāh*, 'Fate', has inflicted upon them and they are exhorted to patience.

*ḥukm Rabbi ḥkum 'alīna fi al-dunya ma tlaqīna we fi al-ākhra
ma thannīna .*

Almighty God willed it. In life we could not be united and in the hereafter we are kept apart (tale S21).

'Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil' (tale S3) is about a prince who falls in love with a far away princess, merely on hearing her description. Guided by his fate, he sets off to join her and conquer her love. In her distant country al-Hājja Mkāda simply awaits his coming which will fulfil her destiny too, "he is destined to be my husband ", she exclaims to her maid Dāda. The prince and the princess are the two poles between which the narrative develops; the marriage of the two lovers constitutes its natural conclusion.

The idea of 'predestined husband' is again clearly exemplified in the following tale.

al-Maktūb (summary S27)

Three girls were able to marry only men who were destined for them. The two eldest girls Ḥasna and Ḥussayna, were sent back home the same wedding night without explanation. The youngest Kāmilt al-Ḥusn, was kept and the marriage

was consummated. Begged by her sisters to unravel the mystery, she asked her husband and he explained that on the first two occasions when he wanted to marry one of the two sisters he heard a voice telling him she wasn't destined for him. The first one was destined for the dog with the seven chains and the second for the one who was swallowed up by the earth because of his beauty. When the two sisters heard this, they decided to search for their destined husbands.

They passed through dangerous experiences and they eventually found their destined husbands and they lived happily ever after.

This tale is a further example of the intervention of Fate in a major event in man's life: marriage. For each person there is a destined marriage partner.

This is a common belief in the three narrators' view. Sa'diyya made the following remark after telling me al-Maktūb (tale S27): *al-tufla yukhtbūha alf emma ma tbāt kān* 'and maktūbha, 'a thousand suitors ask for the hand of a girl but she will only marry her destined partner.'

All the examples cited above reinforce the idea that birth and marriage, two transitional stages in human life, are dependent on God. Another crucial point at which Fate obviously intervenes is death.

6.3.3. Death

The narrators' thoughts often revolve round the hour of death. The idea of a predestined life span and hour of death is clearly stated in passages which tell us that 'someone's hour has come', *sā'tu haḍrit*, or 'has come close', *sā'tu qurbit*. In most cases the reference to death is very clear:

ndunn sā'ti qurbit

I think my hour is drawing near (tale R2).

Man's life span and hour of death is predestined, predetermined by God:

Al-a'mār bi yadi Allāh

life spans are in God's hands (tale R2).

A'mārana bi yadi Allāh

Our span is in God's hands (tale S9).

Ktib laha rabbi we mātīt

Fate caught up with his wife and she died (tale S22).

Rabbi ktib li al-shāyib we māt

Fate caught up with the old man and he died (tale S29).

On reporting the death of a girl to her mother the husband said:

Hadhrit sa'itha, 'amurha kṣīr hadhaka ill 'atāha rabbi

That's her hour, God did not grant her a long lifetime (tale S30).

Nobody dies when his time has not come. In 'You who rebel against God's will, rise and face that which God has ordained' (tale K1) on hearing about her predestined misfortune, a woman tries to take her own life to escape it, but she does not cut her throat properly only because *sā'itha ma hadritsh*, her hour hasn't come yet'.

Death is the common destiny of all men. The same fate awaits us all; when our time is accomplished, we must die; *Kullu nafsin dhāi' qatun al-*

mawt, 'each person will die in turn', said concerned neighbours to comfort a man who was overcome by the death of his most cherished cousin and wife (tale K1).

Common in the world view of the narrators is the idea of an omnipotent God manipulating man's fate but there is also suggestion that predestination allows for human agency.

6.4. Attitudes to fate

In the previous section dimensions of al-Maktūb and the occasions when Fate have been presented. A problem of considerable interest is how people react to fate. Some attention is now given to this 'subjective' aspect. An example is found in the following tale:

Companionship (summary K2)

Once upon a time there was a king who had an only daughter. He was very pious and never missed a prayer. One day after he finished his morning prayer, there appeared a donkey's head before him which greeted him with the respect due to a king and asked him for his daughter's hand. The king refused straight away. The donkey's head warned him that if he didn't agree, his daughter was predestined to be a bird for a year, a stone for a year and an ogress for a year. The king refused on the grounds that "what shall be, shall be ". The donkey's head would appear every day and repeat the same threat, but the king did not give in. One day his daughter overheard the conversation. It saddened her to hear about her misfortune which Allāh had ordained, and she decided to leave for another land rather than disgrace her father. She thought of taking a confidante and companion to help her through her misfortune. She had the vizier's daughters all tested. The youngest 'Aysha proved the most discreet and

trustworthy. She confided her secret to her. 'Aysha advised her "to resign herself to God and to bear it with patience", and they vowed loyalty to each other till death should separate them. The princess had a water tight cabin built. She put in it their provisions for a full year, locked herself and 'Aysha in and asked to be thrown into the depth of the sea.

One day their cabin was tossed on to the shore of a distant land. By then they had run out of provisions. 'Aysha suggested she would go and fetch some food. She came to a mansion. She crept in and stole some food from a table set for the prince. When he came to eat, he found the table in disarray. On the second occasion he decided to watch and arrest the offender himself. On the third day the princess suggested it was her turn to find the food. She was discovered by the prince. On seeing her beauty he asked for her hand. She accepted on condition he provided a private apartment for her own use. The marriage was celebrated and the princess had 'Aysha brought unseen to her private apartment and they continue to live happily.

One day the princess felt a chill, shook all over and turned into a bird. 'Aysha understood it was the beginning of the princess' misfortune and decided to act promptly. She disguised her voice and informed the servants that her father had died and that she was to mourn him for three years , as was their tradition. For a year she took the bird princess into her care, feeding her and nursing her. In the following year the bird princess turned into a stone and finally into an ogress.

At the end of her ordained misfortune, 'Aysha washed her mistress, fed her and restored her health and beauty to her. She dressed her in her best clothing and made her sit waiting for the prince who was told that the mourning period was over. He was overjoyed to see his wife again. She confided her secret to him and she introduced her companion to him. He congratulated her for her courage and resignation saying: "patience has brought you through it". On seeing

'Aysha's beauty he summoned the notaries and contracted her marriage with the vizier's son and they lived happily thereafter.

6.4.1. Patience and resignation

The main idea alluded to is that of man's impotence with regard to fate and the impossibility of altering God's Decree. So an emotional attitude of resignation to God is the 'natural' response. A woman accepts entirely and willingly her three-year destined misfortune. The impulsive reactions of the moment are soon soothed to give way to a total submission to God, and she does not merely bow to her fate, she assumes it and accomplishes it. Her plan to flee is not an attempt to escape her fate, but rather to face it without disgracing her family. In her enterprise she is helped by a chosen companion who would help her through her misfortune. The principal feature of the two women's attitude is concentrated on the word 'patience', *ṣabr*. *Sallam amrik li rabbi we uṣbir 'alli 'aṭāk*, 'resign yourself to God and bear it with patience', says the vizier's daughter, 'Aysha, to comfort her mistress when she confides her secret to her. And when the princess related her past three-year misfortune, the prince her husband congratulated her on her courage and perseverance and said: *bi al-ṣabr kul shay yūfa*, 'patience has brought you through it', *al-ṣabr jamīl*, 'patience is beautiful'. The husband fully expected this reaction, and to the narrator Khīra also it is self evident: *al-ṣabr miftāḥ al-faraj*, 'patience is the key to all problems'. The character of this submission is determined by the nature ascribed to Fate. It is pointless to question. "What shall be, shall be", the father said to the donkey's head who warned him that his daughter would turn into a bird for a year, a stone for a year and finally to an ogress for a year, if he did not give her in marriage to him. All the characters involved in the

narrative show an attitude of resignation to God. Being attributed to God's will, the misfortune that befalls the girl is not contested or questioned. The best thing to do is not to question, but to submit to the decrees of Fate, be contented with what it brings and bear it with patience; in fact a way to rationalize the incomprehensible.

Exhortations to patience and total resignation are numerous in the material under study. A further example is found in 'You who rebel against God's will rise and face what God has ordained' (tale K1). When fate caught up with his wife and she died, a man complained about the blows of fate and he is exhorted to patience and resignation by his kin and neighbours: "Such is God's Decree, bear it with patience, *al-Ṣabr min al-Imān* , 'patience is an article of faith'. It is particularly important to be grateful, for any sign of dissatisfaction with Fate would imply a disapprobation of God's will, and would therefore be an act demonstrating lack of faith.

Al-Ṣabr as man's ideal attitude in time of adversity is openly professed.

"Patience is a virtue", the narrator commented on several occasions.

The concept is deeply anchored in the Qur'ān. Indeed Qur'ānic passages dealing with patience in adversity are numerous, and *al-Ṣabr* is mentioned as a religious duty.

XXXI- O. my son, observe the prayer, urge to what is reputable and refrain from what is disreputable, and endure patiently what befalls thee (Arberry 1982: 185).

Equanimity in the face of all vicissitudes is rooted in the conviction that prosperity and adversity are both sent by God, and therefore must be accepted and borne with patience. So the general attitude portrayed is that of submission and total resignation. But on a few occasions there are

instances of protest and rebellion against God's Decree although they are quickly condemned. In the narrative referred to above 'You who rebel against God's will rise and face what God has ordained' (tale K1), the woman is described railing and raging at her fate, literally cursing it, when she was told about her destined three-year misfortune. She decides to take her own life, which can only be determined by God. Her rebellious behaviour and action are considered blasphemous. Rebelling against God's Decree deserves the stigma of impiety. However, some of the attitudes described are simply reactions of the moment to the blows of Fate. The people involved soon patiently submit to God.

bkāt we ‘ayytit we sallamit amraha li hukm rabbi

She cried and lamented, then gave in to God's command (tale R10).

In times of crisis within the lives of the narrators, just like in those of their heroes and heroines, religion is the central filter through which they interpret and explain experiences and misfortune. They repeatedly stress that every man experiences an awareness that he is God's servant '*abd-Allāh*', 'slave of God', and accepting one's Fate is considered a means of expiation, they explained, a way of gaining God's blessing and grace and ensuring for oneself a place in paradise. Patience and resignation define more than any other factor a true Muslim, absence of it and rebellion is blasphemous and deserve the stigma of impiety, *Kufr*.

6.5. Concluding remarks

The various words for Destiny, *Dahr/Ayyām*, *Bakht/Sa'd*, *Qasm Qaḍā* and *Qadar*, *Qudrat Allāh*, *Hukm Allāh*, are related notions to the concept of *al-Maktūb*. In the view of the three narrators, *al-Maktūb*

intervenes actively in human life sometimes with good sometimes with evil, but mostly carrying misfortune. While there is, on the one hand, an insistence on the total absence of human agency (tales K1, K3, K4, K6) there is on the other an affirmation of it on a few occasions (tale S4; R3). The narrators present a world view which is dominated by notions of ineluctible destiny and the ineffectiveness of any effort to thwart it.

Al-Maktūb taps a crucial vein in the corpus of popular ideas relating to misfortune, for it offers a way of understanding and overcoming it.

Al-Maktūb makes the chaos of experience, including misfortune, comprehensible, reduces the world of the irrational to manageable dimensions.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FEMALE TALE AS A LITERARY GENRE

I have demonstrated earlier that the Tunisian folktale is primarily a woman's art form. Immediately remarkable in the tales in this collection is the recurrence of stock phrases, asides and the use of the diminutive as the most salient stylistic features which give the tales their particular character. This chapter is an examination of these observed feminine peculiarities on the basis of content and form.

7.1. Introduction

The collection presents different kinds of narratives, full length narratives and shorter ones; even shorter are the anecdotes. If we try to elicit a categorisation that is perceived and implicitly differentiated by the narrators themselves, we find that they make a distinction between fiction and non-fiction. They refer to the fictitious tale as *khṛāfa* (tales R1, R2, R3, R7, R9, R10, R13, R16; S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S8, S9, S10, S11, S20, S21, S25, S26, S27; K2, K4), while the non-fictional tales are referred to as *ḥkāya wāq'a*, 'true story' (tales R5, R6, R15; S13, S15, S18, S19, S23, S28, S30), or *nukta*, 'anecdote/joke' (S12, S14, S16, S17; R5).

In reality the categories of the narratives are not sharply and clearly defined. The tendencies underlying the tales themselves show a variety of combinations; sometimes they are more fantastical and sometimes more realistic. This division I have followed for convenience. A number of different factors come together around these two poles: most of the stories in the collection present a certain number of structural features - opening and closing formulae, stock phrases - whose occurrence depends on the construction of a day-to-day, detailed representation of real life or of a

world of fantasy. The fantasy-type narratives are punctuated with stock phrases or verbal formulae. The personal style of the narrator also greatly affects the nature of the stock phrases employed.

The narrators employ numerous verbal formulae in the course of their communication. The formulae were identified through repetition and through their distinctive structural features. The frequency of usage varies from narrator to narrator. Most stories employ formulae in varying degrees. The beginning and end of tales are always formulaic as are other parts within the tale. The same formula is sometimes repeated over and over again within the same story (tales R1, R2, S10). For instance in 'Şābra' (tale R1), the formula on the theme of conception and child birth is repeated three times. Each time a child is born, the related formula accompanies the birth.

The selection and extent of the usage of formulae depend not only on the intention and creativity of the narrator but also upon the nature and response of the audience. Khīra explained to me that her use of formulae depended on the audience and her own mood and degree of inspiration, "just like an Arab musician who, when improvising, relies heavily on the people's response and degree of concentration and his own internal mood." Khīra is referring here to the audience which she can exploit and be influenced by. The narrators have the notion that in the context of tale-telling, the close connection between the artist and audience can fuse into an identity, a good mood on the part of the narrator and a responsive audience combine to trigger a significantly increased frequency of formulae. Başgoz studied live performances in Turkey closely and reported that a responsive audience led to an increased frequency of usage of formula, and that a narrator selected different formulae for different audiences (Başgoz 1978).

The formulae and their use in prose narratives clearly belong to an identifiable tradition. They belong to the tale-telling register and seem to be the common property of female story-tellers. A close analysis of the tales in a recent collection of Tunisian tales (Baklouti 1988), shows clearly that there are hardly any formulae in the tales told by men, whereas female tales abound in formulae that vary on a regional basis.

The narrator employs the formula and the audience recognizes it as soon as it is narrated. On one occasion, I visited Khīra for our routine afternoon session of chatting and recording. On that day she happened to be visited by four female relatives and one male. This did not upset our plans and Khīra to my delight accepted willingly to perform in front of the guests. Khīra opened her tale with an invitation to declare God's oneness. The audience responded (see section on opening formulae). When she recited the formulae, she relied on a special intonation, as can easily be detected in the recording, and the women joined in chorus to recite with her the bracketed line:

al-Ṣabāḥ ṣabbah

[Willi yiṣalli 'ala al-Nabi yirbah]

A new day is born

[And he who praises the Prophet will be blessed]

It is not coincidental that the only male in the audience did not participate in the performance. He simply was not acquainted with the formulae since story telling sessions were most often restricted to women.

7.2. The formula

This section will be devoted to the examination of some of the most commonly repeated phrases and narrative blocks within the tales and the question of the function of the oral formulaic expressions, considered in the light of schemes advanced by Lord and other scholars who have contributed significantly to the academic debate on the theory of oral traditions.

Recurring formulaic terms and phrases have widely been interpreted and accepted as conventions appropriate for the exigencies of orally transmitted literature, verse and prose alike. Parry (1928) studied the epithets in Homeric poems and came to the conclusion that they should be understood as a product of oral composition and sought to substantiate the theory by studying at first hand the living tradition of oral narrative song in Yugoslavia accompanied by his pupil, Lord. Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Lord's argument in chapter five of 'The Singer of Tales' is his contention that Yugoslav epic singers do not memorise their tales but create them in the act of performance. For Lord, 'oral' is not only the performance but also the 'composition'. The narrator draws from the tradition a grammar of words and narrative blocks, i.e. 'Formula', a phrase that helps the narrator to verbalise, and generate within the metre (Lord 1960).

From his detailed study of Yugoslav epic were derived universal principles of oral technique which he and other scholars applied to other literatures, (eg., Haymes 1980, Foley 1976). However, prose narrative received only limited attention in formula research despite the fact that the formula is just as essential a part of the prose performance, even given the absence of metrical patterning.

The great majority of the collections of Tunisian oral narratives published

during the last decades lack formulae and give no attribution to the male or female story teller and so could not be considered for comparison (Bouhdiba 1977, Laroui 1978). By and large, scholars, as guardians of the official literate culture have long recoiled from anything that departed from classical canons. The tales published have been carefully edited and the formulae filtered out.

However I was able to check the findings with one recent collection of oral narratives recorded from men and women (Baklouti 1988). But of the tales in this collection only a small proportion are told by men, (in fact five out of twenty seven). Baklouti indicates at the end of each story which are by men and which are by women. He reckons himself that the male contribution is minimal/modest. "Dans notre corpus de contes Tunisiens, plus des deux tiers ont été transmis par des femmes, les narrateurs masculins n'interviennent que dans une proportion assez modeste" (Baklouti 1988: 19). It is clear that he was only able to find a few male narrators of tales. The tales in his collection have no additional annotation and in so far as it is possible to say anything on the basis of the few examples, the impression is given that, apart from elements of personal narrative style, the sex of the narrator influences which formula is used or indeed whether formulae are used at all. The male narrators are less prone to employ formulaic expressions of any sort particularly within the tales. Only one narrator out of five started his tale with an opening formula, and closing formulae are totally non-existent. The common closing expression used by all is: *hādhi khrāfit* ..., 'this was the tale of....'

In her study of Moroccan tales recorded from female and male narrators, Smith (1984), also came to the same conclusion: formulae are hardly existent in male tales whereas female tales abound in them. "On the basis of the examples of this collection it seems that the sex of the narrator influences whether the refrain is sung or spoken, or in fact whether

refrains are used at all" (Smith 1984: 666).

However, Connelly's study of *Sīrat Beni Hilāl* shows that stock phrases and stereotyped diction are frequent in epic narratives sung by Tunisian male bards (Connelly 1990). This adds corroborative evidence that men and women draw on divergent forms of folklore and subject matter.

7.3. Types of formulae and their forms

The section will be subdivided into three main parts: part 1 considers the various structural characteristics of formulae; part 2 discusses the content of formulae; part 3 examines the functions of formulae in the narratives, in this case using a particular tale in illustration.

7.3.1. Structure

This section describes some linguistic devices which contribute to the coherence and unity of formulaic sentences. Fixed, rhythmically balanced expressions are frequent in the material collected. Through repetition they have become specific stereotyped phrases. They range from a simple phrase to longer narrative blocks.

7.3.1.1. Simple sentence:

The formula consists of a simple statement:

Kān Allāh fi kull mkān

God is omnipresent.

This religious interjection occurs isolated or may occur as part of a longer

narrative block (cf. section on opening formulae).

7.3.1.2. Compound sentence:

Often the formula consists of more than one statement:

il'ab li'bātik we idhak duhkātik
we ghudwa rabbi yaqdi hājītna we hājātik

Laugh your morose ideas away
and tomorrow God will fulfil our wishes and yours

7.3.1.3. Narrative blocks:

The oral-formulaic nature is observable not only in such repeated phrases as those cited above, but also in putting larger blocks or units of material together. Some of the longer formulae could be termed narrative blocks. A complete formulaic passage is common in the middle of a narrative relating a standard theme, i.e. the sickness of a prince/princess,

Wild al-ṣultān rawwah lil-qṣar, dhin wijhu bit al-tbin we rqad fi
farsh al-ghban, jābu al-tubba we al-munajjmīn mta' al-mamlaka,
illi hādha yiqūl marḍu qlaq lā himma lā 'araq

The prince went back to the palace, his face turned as pale as straw and he slept on a sick bed. All the physicians and the magicians of the kingdom were summoned. They all said that the prince was suffering neither from fever nor sweating, but from depression/melancholy.

Or a whole final section relating the celebration of a wedding:

*'amlu al-mitfarrḥāt seb'a ayyām we seb'a lyiāli, lā min yunfikh
we lā min yuṭbikh kān fī dār al-ṣultān*

The wedding, was celebrated, seven days and seven nights, when no
fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house.

The compound sentences and longer narrative blocks are marked by
features of balanced lengths, parallelism, assonance and rhyme, which are
discussed below. The archetypal narrative blocks presented above occur
with but slight variation again and again throughout the tales (tales R2; S1,
S3, S8, S10, S11, S20, S25, S27; K2).

7.3.2. Assonance and rhyme

As noted above, the formulae are texturally and structurally different
from ordinary prose sentences. They are often expressed in assonant or
rhyming form, particularly end-rhyme. An example follows:

*thlātha wḥam
thāṭa shḥam
thlātha yiabbsu jilda 'ala 'aḍam*

Three months of craving
Three months of fleshing out
Three months of tautening skin on bone

The text uses the three underlined end-rhymes [am] and parallelism
between the three parts of the text. The number of syllables is not

balanced. The articulation is marked by the repetition of the word *thlātha*, 'three'.

Two further examples with a salient internal rhyme:

mnayyra ya mnayyra shbi lillāk mḥayyra

Lamp, Oh! lamp, why is your lady upset?

lamm zādu we zuwwādu we ma yiqirr 'la qalbu we iffādu

He gathered together provisions and all his heart's desires

7.3.3. Internal constitution

The most apparent characteristic of this formula is its adding style, the juxtaposition of lines, each one containing a complete thought. Indeed this is a characteristic of formulae. Each line within the formula constitutes a whole sentence, and the text amplifies this by adding a further idea within the formula. The ideas may also be linked coordinately. In the following example, the syllable [bah] provides internal rhyme and another [ṣ], a further sound echo.

al-ṣabāḥ ṣabbah

Willi yiṣalli 'ala al-Nabi yirbah

A new day is born

And he who praises the Prophet

will be blessed

Pleonasm is another characteristic of the formula. The narrator starts an

idea and then repeats it pleonastically with slight variation, as the following examples will demonstrate:

nūmu mafzūz

we farshu mahzūz

His sleep is disturbed
and his bed upset

In the example cited above, the narrator says *nūmu mafzūz*, 'his sleep is disturbed', then adds *we farshu mahzūz*, 'his bed upset'. The second line takes up the metaphoric meaning of the first: disrupted sleep

dhin wijhu bi al-tbin

we rqad fi farsh al ghban

His face turned as pale as straw
And he slept on a sick bed

The first line describes figuratively a prince's sickness. The idea is reiterated in the second line.

In formulae many archaic words, no longer used in every day speech, are to be found. For example, *mefzūz* 'upset', *zād we zuwwādu*, 'provisions', 'pitcher', are not normally used in ordinary speech. *Zād* and *Zuwwād*, 'provisions' are related to migration which characterized the nomadic societies in which the tales originated.

7.4. Content of formulae

This section will consider the opening formulae, the closing formulae and the formulae contained within the tales. The openings and endings of most stories are marked by conventional formulae. The tales follow in large measure the epic laws of narration defined by Olrick. He considers the use of opening and closing formula one of the basic 'epic laws' of folk narratives. "The sage does not begin with sudden action and does not end abruptly. This is the law of opening and closing" (Olrick 1965: 131). The length and content of formulae depend to a large extent on the individual narrator.

7.4.1. The opening formulae

The opening formula is particularly important in orally performed narration, for it is there that the narrator sets up her contract with the audience and orients herself. In the collection under study, formulae vary from teller to teller. They sometimes occur without interruption, as in the case of Sa'diyya or Ghāya, or require a response as in the case of Khīra. All three narrators open with a pious statement celebrating the 'divine authority', an invocation of God's omniscience: *Kān Allāh fi kull mkān* 'God is omnipresent', or God's oneness, *twahhdu Allāh*, 'declare God's oneness'. The mention of God at the start is not coincidental. First it establishes God's authority vis-a-vis what is to come, and expresses at once the cultural framework within which the events will be revealed. Once God's authority is firmly established, the narrator proceeds. What follows varies in length from *Kānkum ma kān*. 'once upon a time', to long introductory prayers. The choice of phrases is to a large extent dependent on the individual narrator.

The three narrators use different varieties of opening formulae. A rudimentary formula is used by Ghāya. *Kān Allāh fi kull mkān* , is used on all occasions she narrates except when telling jokes and anecdotes.

Khīra uses a more semantically complex opening formula:

twahḥdu Allāh ! willi 'alīh dhanb yistaghfar Allāh

Declare God's oneness

And whoever has sinned, invoke his pardon

Here Khīra establishes a contract with the listeners through the sacred word, the sacred language. Any Muslim who is ordered to declare God's oneness must respond. The listening contract is established. Benveniste (1974) states that the speaker uses lexical and syntactic forms, which he calls 'functions', i.e. interrogation, intimidation and orders, as aspects of the discourse, to influence the behaviour of the addressee:

Des lors que l'énonciateur se sert de la langue pour influencer en quelque manière le comportement de l'allocutaire, il dispose a cette fin d'un appareil de fonctions. C'est d'abord l'interrogation, qui est une énonciation construite pour susciter une 'réponse', par un procès linguistique qui est en meme temps un procès de comportement a double entrée. Toutes les formes lexicales et syntaxiques de l'interrogation.....relèvent de cet aspect de l' énonciation (Benveniste 1974 : 84).

In the present context Khīra addresses the listeners in the imperative to put them somehow under her spell and directly involves them in the

performance by inviting them to make the *shahāda*, 'confession of faith', and invoke God's oneness and his pardon. The tale is introduced in a religious and sacred framework. All the listeners present at the time of the performance responded in one voice:

La ilāh illa Allāh, Muḥammad rasūl Allāh

There is no God but God and Muḥammad is his messenger.

This formula clearly has a moral dimension as if the communicative event which will take place between the narrators and the listeners, i.e. the imaginative discourse, threatens to affect their integrity, so a divine sanction is needed. This formula is sometimes extended in some parts of Tunisia. A sequence is occasionally added: *Awwal htūf we thāni htūf we thālith htūf, awwal htūf man yitkabbar we būh ma'rūf, we thāni htūf man yilbis al-ḥrīr fūq al-ṣūf we thālith htūf man yākhudh barrāniyya we bint 'ammu tshūf*, 'first maxim, second and a third maxim. The first maxim is he who boasts while his father is known. The second maxim is he who wears silk on wool and the third maxim is he who marries a foreigner while his cousin is available' (Baklouti 1988).

Sa'diyya uses an even more elaborate and semantically complex formula; something of a metanarrative. It was Dundes (1966) who first proposed the term metafolklore, which he saw mainly as a vehicle of literal-verbal criticism, or in other words as a "folkloristic explanation of folklore genre". By metanarrative I mean the devices that index or comment on the narrative itself or those elements by which it is constituted. Sa'diyya not only involves the audience, as does Khīra, but also presents the world of the tale with its inner logic and constituents: various forms of obliqueness

and allusion, ruse, malice, the supernatural, good and evil, devices which are all put forward to index the story-telling and initiate the listener and serve as a foretaste, a preface to the tales (tales S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S8, S10, S11, S20, S21, S25, S27).

After celebrating God's omnipresence, she proceeds:

Baytna ḥrīr we baytkum kittān
Bayt al-a'dā bi al-jrāba' we al-firān
Ḥdīthna 'ajīb ṣlātna we ṣlatkum 'al al-nabi al-ḥabīb
'Azūzet al-Stūt la yirḥamha nhār illi tmūt
Tudkhul min 'ayn al-ibra al-misqiyya
Tqūl maws'ik yā mulk rabbi 'aliyya
Tudkhul min zannūnit al-brīq t
Tqūl al-dīq lā yiḥammilni shay lā nṭīq
Mshāt tājib fī al-smann
Jābit mukh al-sūqi fī al-ṣḥann
Mshāt tājib fī al-'ajār miṭwi jābittu yimshi
Yā sāda we yā māda yidillna we yidillkum li al-khayr we al-
shāda
Kān ma Kān

Our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemies' tent is full of mice and rats.

My tale is of wonder/marvel.

May our prayers and yours be offered up to our beloved Prophet.

May the old witch be damned.

She passes through the eye of a fine needle saying: "How large is God's kingdom". She passes through the spout of the pitcher saying:

"I can't bear with such narrowness, may I never have to put up with it".

She went out to get some ghee, she came back with the grocer's brain on a plate.

She went out to get a folded veil, she came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners! May we all be guided to the good and the profession of faith.

Once upon a time

This formula is explicitly a metanarrational discourse and is semantically complex and rich in contrasts and images. Four segments can be distinguished, the first being:

Our tent was made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemies' tent is full of mice and rats.

Here Sa'diyya establishes her stance towards her subject matter and the audience. She sets the scene by establishing her authority as a narrator. She demarcates herself vis-a-vis her audience and third parties. 'Silk', 'linen', 'mice' shows a gradation in value implying a decreasing scale of rank. This is a statement of the marvellous, fantasising relationship and power structure. On the discursive and symbolic level, silk can also suggest the richness of the narrator and the ease which facilitates the flow of the discourse.

In the second segment, the metanarrational function is overt and prominent. The expression acts to comment on the nature of the tale. The narrator comments on her art and defines the content as marvellous,

fabulous, enigmatic and strange. All is comprised in the Arabic adjective '*ajīb* : *ḥdīthna 'ajīb* , 'my tale is one of wonder'. '*ajīb*, can also stand for allegory or figurative expression both referring to form and content. In yet another variation of the same phrase which I noted in 'the Sparkling Maiden' (tale S20) Sa'diyya uses *bi al-tartīb*, 'well ordered'. As a rhetorical term, *tartīb* may also mean poetry, rhyme. Talking again about the marvellous, i.e. the irrational/subversive, another protection is needed:

ṣlātna w ṣlātkum 'ala al-Nabi al-ḥabīb

May our prayers and yours be offered up to our beloved Prophet

The third section is the most complex. It is also metanarrational. The narrator introduces a character central to most stories, namely *Azūzet al-Stūt* 'the old witch'. We note that the old witch is other than what logic could expect. The most striking image is that of narrowness and width. In the initial segment her passage through the eye of the needle is used as a metaphor for restricted space. The conventional measures of space are inapplicable: the narrow becomes wide and the wide narrow. The old witch seems to manipulate space according to her own will. On the surface level, this clearly indicates the old witch's ability to transcend the confines of space and the natural order of things, perhaps symbolizing the breadth of her field of action. The figurative non-linear, poetic level of deeper meaning could point to the eye of the needle as a symbolic metaphor for the vagina and by metonymy to the womb, i.e. creation/procreation, and at a wider level refers to procreation as a female prerogative just as tale creation is the province of women. Conversely, the spout of the pitcher could refer to the male organ which is 'narrow' meaning sterile, non-procreative/creative. In Tunisia, men tell mainly historic legends and

myths, whereas the tale is specifically a woman's art form. The metaphor could be extended to a sexual joke: the penis seems large, but is in fact small and inadequate.

She went to get some ghee, but she got the grocer's brain on a plate.

She went out to get a folded veil, she came back with it walking beside her.

This implies she came back with the woman herself. The veil is a symbol for the female. A possible interpretation of both segments is that of pointing to the old witch's evil nature and infinite power over men and women.

'*Azūzet al-Stūt* is indeed a complex and ambivalent character. The name is derived from the number *sitta*, 'six'. *Stūt* is the plural and therefore an amplification of the figure six, meaning old. In Tunisia and in the case of women, old age is commonly associated with evil, insanity and absolute freedom of action. (In the Bible number six is associated with the devil). Indeed '*Azūzet al-Stūt* is all-powerful agent of evil and a destructive force. She is a deceitful and cunning character who does not seem to be confined by the same restrictions as other people. She is an agent of disorder and disintegration; she upsets the order of things (tales S2, S4 , S7, S11; R7) but also redresses wrongs (tale S3). She changes according to the nature of her intervention and always dresses as a pious old woman; she wears a green robe, paints her stick green, carries a rosary and wraps herself in a green shawl, (when connected with Islam, green symbolizes sacredness, holiness and paradise) to gain immediate respect and trust from those she intends to deceive. She sometimes appears as a long lost aunt (tale R3; S4), or a helpless old widow (tale S11), making her living from intrigues, as a

go-between. She sows disorder in households (tale S7) and stops at nothing to achieve her ends. The formula points to all this.

The formula is not easy to interpret. In an attempt to find a unifying sense comprising all the elements of the passage, one possibility is not to take the images in their literal meaning but as an indication of the infinite possibilities of imagination and the creative process: the narrator is saying that there is no limit to her power as a creator. She establishes herself as the creator of her own discourse. In this respect, *Kān ya ma kān*, 'once upon a time', does not only serve to set the scene in the distant past, removing the event of the narrative from the present, but also is part and parcel of the poetic creation and suggests (une envolée poétique), a poetic departure.

This formula, in particular, is typical of the region of Tunis. Other formulaic beginnings of narrative are found in various parts of Tunisia. Baklouti's (1988) collection of tales from various parts of Tunisia display different verbal formulae which vary on a regional basis.

Both simple and complex formulae are used to mark the transition from the real world to the world of the tale.

7.4.2. Closing formulae

The closing formulae are as formalized as the opening. Most often a very brief and conventional optimistic phrase, the customary definitive folk tale closure of wedded bliss concludes the fantasy-type stories, told by Ghāya, Khīra or Sa'diyya alike (tales: R1, R2, R3, R13, R19; S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S7, S10, S11, S21, S24, S25, S27, K1, K2).

We 'āshu fi- al-thabāt we al-nabāt
ḥatta mātit we māt

They lived in safety and procreated
until death did them part

The ritual of procreation alluded to in the opening is here made explicit by
a call for fecundity, *al-nabāt* .

khrāfitna hāba hāba
al-‘ām al-jāy tjīna šāba

Our tale has gone with the wind
May we have a good crop next year.

After the narrator's flight of imagination has wandered there seems to be a need for a return to day-to-day reality marked with the hope of a fruitful and fertile year: 'May we have a good harvest' is a regular invocation looking for luck and safety. It could also be a call for the germination of the tales; a celebration of the imaginative discourse. With the expression "May we have a good crop next year", the narrator is almost setting another rendez-vous for more and more tales to come.

A further variant is less commonly used by Ghāya and Sa‘diyya:

We mshayna we khallaynāhum we min hāk al-nahār mā
raynāhum

There we left them and *we* have never seen them since (tale S2, R3, R7).

This formula gives the narrative more credibility by enabling the listeners to believe that the narrator had taken part in the narrative. To take the wording of the phrase to the letter, the narrator seems to have witnessed the actions of the story and come back to recount them. Here the narrators and the listeners are aware that this is only of a transition from the marvellous world of the tale to the real world. We note that at the beginning of the tale-telling, there was a sort of a separation between the "I" /the narrator and the "you"/audience, but as the tale progresses and towards the end a sort of an osmosis/harmony is created: the "I" and "you" give way to "we", *mshayna we khallaynāhum* , 'there we left them'. The 'fusion' between the narrator and the audience is now complete.

According to Nicostain, 'Once upon a time' removes "the events to be narrated from the dateable calendar-bound, documentable chronology of history," whereas closing phrases like 'they lived happily thereafter', "ease the story back into that temporarily abandoned historical time." (Nicostain 1980: 17) The frame, opening and closing the tales, explicitly signals the conceptual isolation of the tale and its separation from everyday discourse, *le discours du réel*. More elements within the tales emphasize further this isolation. These formulae allow the hearers to understand the character of the communication, without confusing a fictitious narrative with reality.

7.4.3. Formulae within the tales

Apart from the ways of marking the unity of a story at the beginning or end by verbally standardized phrases, stories exhibit an inner organisational pattern of formulae which are not scattered at random as will be demonstrated. As semantic units they seem to be attached to certain occasions, certain points and parts of the tales. Some of them, such as the description of the event of pregnancy, the growing up of a child, a

comment on the new day, and the passing of time turn up in story after story with all narrators. In an attempt to find a common denominator for these formulae, a pattern seems to emerge around three concepts : Time, space and internal/psychological space, meaning emotional state, perhaps reflecting the corresponding concepts in the narrators' minds. (Not all formulae will fit into these categories.)

7.4.3.1. Time

The hero's or heroine's mother's pregnancy. The nine months corresponds to the length of human pregnancy :

thlātha wham

thlātha sham

thātha yiabbsu jild 'ala 'adam

Three months of craving

Three months of fleshing out

Three months of tautening skin on bone

The text has an iconic dimension. The three lines become progressively longer, the last and longest line forming the base of a kind of triangle, which recalls the various gestational stages and similarly the growing belly of the pregnant woman.

The birth of the hero/heroine (a point in time):

talqit talqa jābit tflul qadd al-falqa

yiqūl li al-qamar uzruq wella khan-nuzriq

She gave birth to a baby boy/girl
As beautiful as the moon

In Arabic *al-Falaq* is used to refer to the brightness of the first streaks of the dawn light. A beautiful woman is commonly described as *jamilatun ka filqati al-qamar*, as beautiful as the first streaks of the moon light (Lisān al-‘Arab V: 3462).

The growth of the hero/heroine:

The same principle underlined in the first example can be applied here, to suggest the development of the child.

ḥbā
dbā
shadd fi al-hayt we mshā

The baby crawled,
toddled,
held onto the wall and walked

One standard that emerges is the degree to which the rhetoric corresponds to women's biological and physical experiences, suggested from the focus in the formulae presented above. Their bodily identification as women predominates. Apart from the vaginal image in Sa'diyya's opening formula, these formulae within the tales frame a world and use images rooted in female experiences; their biological and domestic roles. The narrators narrate women's experiences of gestation, conception,

childbirth; experiences unique to women. Notably no men are mentioned. The discursive context of the narratives was a female narrator interpreting a story of conception, pregnancy and birth to an audience that is normally and traditionally all female. In exclusively female story-telling gatherings, female biological experiences are clearly a favourite theme. women's stories are also told for the purpose of self-sharing. *On raconte et on se raconte.*

In the epic narratives sung by men, the most frequent formulae are rooted in male experiences involving tribal matters and tribal place names, battles and battle themes, ruling and heroic exploit (Connelly 1990: 92).

The passage of time

The passage of time is expressed in one word which is always repeated three times. The span covered is sometimes two weeks, two months, two years, fifteen years, but mostly unspecified .

barra barra barra

Time passed

According to Olrik the number three is also law in folk narrative: the law of repetition which is always tied to the number three and distinguishes folk narrative literature from modern literature:

Three is the maximum number of men and objects which occur in traditional narratives. Nothing distinguishes the great bulk of folk narrative from modern literature and from reality as much as does the number three (Olrik 1965: 133).

Day break:

A religious formula is used whenever a new day dawns to express the wish that the new day will bring success and re-establish and renew the link with the listeners (tales K1, K2; R1, R2, R10, R16; S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S7, S8, S10, S11...etc)

al-ṣbāh ṣabbah willi yṣalli 'ala al-Nabi yirbah

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet
will be blessed

7.4.3.2. Power of the word over time:

The following expression explains the discrepancy between the actual slow course of events in real life in contrast with their accelerated narration in the tale. It emphasizes the power of the word over events and Art. The word has a sort of magic potency and a seductive power over the listener through its ability to manipulate chronological time to achieve its own version of narrative time (tales R1, R2; S1, S2, S3, S4, S10, S20).

Wild al-dinya yikbir fi 'ām we 'āmayn

We wild al-khrāfa yikbir fi kilma we kilmtayn

In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale.

7.4.3.3. Space

The transition from one space into another is expressed in a formula.(tales R2, R3, R13; S1, S3, S4, S8, S10, S21, S27).

Yimshi yimshi, yimshi
Yakhli blād we yi‘mmar blād
we ma yi‘ammarha kân al-‘Azîz al-Jawwād

He walked and walked and walked
Emptying one land and filling another
And no land can be filled
except by our dear almighty God

The setting off on a journey is also expressed in a formula (tales R2, R3, R13; S1, S3, S4, S8, S10, S21, S27).

lamm zādu we zuwwādu
We ma yqir ‘ala qalbu we iffādu
He gathered together provisions
and all his heart's desires

7.4.3.4. Psychological space/emotional state

The hero's or heroine's psychological sickness (tale S3, 8, 11, 21)

Dhin wijhu bit-tbin
We rqad fi farsh al-ghban

His face turned as pale as straw
And he lay in a sick bed.

The hero's or the heroine's emotional state (S 2, 3, 8, 11, 21):

Depression and melancholy:

Marḍu qlaq la ḥimma la 'araq

His sickness is neither fever nor sweating · but depression.

Sadness and grief (R2; S 9, S10; K2):

rawwah li-al-dār ḥzīn rzīn

al-'ayn qulla we al-ḥjir ḥallāb

He went back home sad and low

The eyes are a jar and the lap a pitcher

Unhappiness (R2, 13, S27):

Iḍḥak ḍuḥkātik we il'ab li'bātik

we ḡhudwa rabbi yaqḍi ḥājītna we ḥājātik

Laugh your morose ideas away

Tomorrow God will fulfil our wishes.

In addition to the above expressions, many tales display a common exclamation at a young man's/woman's beauty (taleR1, R7, S1, S2, S3, S7, K5):

Subḥān al-Khallāq fī ma yakhlaq

Praise to the creator who created him with such beauty

In every-day discourse, *Subḥān al-Khallāq fī ma yakhlaq*, is a religious

expression commonly used to protect the person described and ward off the evil eye. It is used in the tale as a seductive technique to give some sense of immediacy to the tale. In a narrative, the hero is a fictitious being, using the device is a means to legitimise his beauty and appeal to the listeners' senses and make the story credible.

7.5. The function of the formulae

Formulae have various functions. We want to use the corpus to outline the general patterns and select one for special treatment in order to recognise the rationale behind the technique and draw some conclusions.

These functions are as follows:

7.5.1. Aesthetic device/seductive device

Formulae serve as embellishments which mark the textural features of the narrative, and this is consciously recognized by both listeners and narrators. The narrators call them *twāshi*. The singular *istawshiyya*, from the root *washshā* in Arabic, meaning to embellish. *twāshi* 'textural ornamentation' is the art of hiding the meaning of words and suggesting it through the medium of the metaphor. Khīra explains that *twāshi* are to a tale, what nuts are to a cake; a decorated cake is a real pleasure for the eye and the taste. "One eats a cake with his eyes and a story with his ears" (Khīra 20/3/1990). Sa'diyya suggests that the *twāshi* are used to embellish in the same way as *Naqsh*, 'engraving'. She adds, "the beauty of a story is in its *twāshi*, and *ranna*, "beat/rhyme". The good narrator is someone who toys with the listeners and delights their ears with resounding *ranna*. She must be creative in the use of stylistic effects" (Sa'diyya, interview, 8/2/1990).

The above comments suggest that what pleases the listeners is related to the technique of the narrator. The narrators consciously engage in a verbal game to seduce the listener. The stylistic effects are perceived as being deployed in the use of formulae and creativity manifested in their use.

The audience is also knowledgeable. They not only hear, they listen for the *twāshi* and take pleasure in them as much as the story. I engaged in a discussion about the use of *twāshi* immediately after a performance given by Khīra. I mentioned above that on that occasion the listeners joined in the recitation at one point of the story where formulae were used. In both the narrator's and listener's view, a good narrator is someone who masters *fann al-khrāfa*, 'art of the tale', and principally its *twāshi*, 'embellishment/embroidery'. Canons of taste and artistry in storytelling involve an assessment of ways in which formulae have been deployed within the text, as Finnegan pointed out :

It is evident that one way of discovering the extent of the individual artistry involved in the narration is through the investigation of individual narrators' relevant skills and idiosyncrasies (Finnegan 1971: 386).

Al-Twāshi are therefore, important elements of the grammar of discourse used by the narrators to put their stamp and personal marks on their art.

7.5.2. Compositional device

Having established the aesthetic and ludic value of formulae it is necessary to see how they function structurally in narration. 'Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil' (tale S2) will be closely examined for this purpose.

Parry originally defined formulae in Homeric and South Slavic tradition

as, "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Lord quoting Parry 1960: 30). According to Lord, "the poetic grammar of oral epic is and must be based on the formula" (Lord 1960: 65). In his composition, the singer of the Epic relies on basic melodic ready-made formulae, which means that the compositional process is based upon the formulae throughout.

In the tale under consideration formulae are also deployed but not to the same degree of importance to the text as described by Lord, but they constitute an integral part of the story. Başgoz studied the formulae in Turkish tale telling from various perspectives. He states that, "the formula is an essential element in the prose performance" (Başgoz 1978: 21).

In this tale, in most cases the narrator does not employ the formulae at random but rather at the heart of the narrative. Elegance is not sought per se. Wherever formulae are used they are essential and effective devices for rhetorically underlining key events. In this narrative, in addition to their rhetorical use, formulae have a crucial structural function. They help drive the narrative forward, as I will demonstrate.

We can clearly see the structural role of the formula if we look at the way Sa'diyya uses it at specific stages of narrative production. She 'paragraphs' the narratives by blocking conceptually related information, expressed in formulaic form, making it a single unit by means of differentiating it from what has gone before and what is coming after.

In this example she uses formulae in moments of transition between different stages of the narrative: (i) the birth of the hero and his growing (ii) his sickness, (iii) his departure/migration/journey, (iv) his encounter with the princess, and (v) his wedding.

Hmid al-Mitjawwil

A childless king yearns for a child to complete his happiness, He resorts to all means to have a child, but to no avail. An angel appears and helps the couple. The wife conceives. At this stage the formula occurs to mark the beginning of the next narrative stage and highlight the event. A rise in pitch could easily be detected in the recording, followed by a falling pitch.

thlātha wḥam

thlātha shḥam

thlātha yiabbsu jild ‘ala ‘aḍam

Three months of craving

Three months of fleshing out and

three months of tautening of skin on bone

The birth of the hero:

ṭalqit ṭalqa jābit ṭful

Qadd al-falqa

She gave birth to a baby boy

As beautiful as the moon

His growing:

al-wlid ḥbā, dbā, shadd fi al-ḥayṭ we mshā

The baby crawled, toddled, held on to the wall and walked

A parallelism could be established between the rising pitch and the build-up of tension expressed by the first part of the three formulae on the one

hand, and on the other the falling pitch corresponding to the release of tension leading to the end of gestation, the birth of the child and his first walking steps. This acoustic dimension emphasizes further the use of formulae.

Semantically related units, (conception, gestation, birth, childhood), are grouped and expressed in a formulaic form. The style is marked by lexical economy. Such 'adding' carries the story forward. The following formula constitutes a jump in time:

Wild al-dinya yikbir fi 'ām we 'āmayn

We wild al-khrāfa yikbir fi kilma we kilmtayn

In real life a child grows in a year or two

Just in a couple of words in a tale

Fifteen to twenty years elapse. The child is now a young man. The narrator comments on the power of the word in the narrative and explains the discrepancy between the actual slow course of events in real life in contrast with their accelerated narration in the tale. The narrative progresses.

Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil had grown into a despotic young man, abusing every young or old woman on his path. The men turned to an old witch to put an end to his evil excesses. She sets him a difficult task: finding and courting the beautiful and unattainable princess *al-Ḥājja Mkāda*. The name of the heroine is quite significant. *Mkāda* is derived from *makīda*, a word in Classical Arabic meaning, 'trap'. The unattainable princess is indeed a trap set by the old witch for the prince to get rid of him. The prince is lovesick on hearing her description.

Other conceptually related information (sickness, depression, melancholy, is expressed in a long formulaic narrative block to highlight another narrative stage: the prince's sickness.

wild al-ṣultān rawwah li al-qṣar
dhin wijhu bi al-tbin
we rqaḍ fi farsh al-ghban
āsh bi sīdna nūmu mafzūz
we farshu mahzūz
Jābu al-ṭubba we al-munajjmīn mta' al-qṣar
illi hādha yqūl marḍu qḷaq la ḥimma la 'araq

The prince went back to the palace,
His face turned as pale as straw
And he slept in a sick bed.
What's wrong with our lord?
His sleep is disturbed and bed upset
All the physicians and the magicians of the palace were summoned.
They all said that the prince's sickness was neither fever nor
sweating but depression.

Ḥmid al-Mitjawwil set off to seek the beautiful princess. The journey is another stage in the narrative.

The journey:

The journey-related formula occurs again within a thematically unified concept.

Hazz m'āh zādu we zuwwādu

we ma yiqirr 'ala qalbu we iffādu

He gathered together provisions for the journey

And took with him all his heart's desires

The prince *rḥal*, 'took to the road'....

Yimshi, yimshi, yimshi

Yakhli blād we yi'ammār blād

we ma yi'ammārha kân al-'Azīz al-Jawwād

He walked and walked and walked

Emptying one land and filling another

And no land can be filled except by our dear Almighty God

We note the occurrence within this formula of many verbs expressing metaphorically the idea of motion, i.e. *yimshi*, 'walk', *yi'ammār*, 'enter', *Yakhli*, 'exit'. In such a way the narrative passes quickly.

An old shoemaker helps Ḥmid al-mitjawwil find the princess *al-Hājja Mkāda*. The encounter is a climactic moment in the story. The formula gives way to another device not less significant in marking single moments in the narrative. This section of the narrative is in verse. Poetry in this context has the same rhetoric function as the formula. The poetry rhetorically underlines a climactic moment.

He greeted her, saying:

Ya al-hājja ya Mkāda

Ya kāyda kull kāyid

wi al-‘ilm jāni ‘ashiyya
we rkibt we q‘adt sāyib
‘Amaynn ya ḥājja we āna fi al-waṭan sāyib
Lā min yrūf ‘aliyya
Lā min yurud al ghrāyib

You who have broken every young man's heart
News of your beauty reached me one day
And at once I set off without delay
For two years I wandered around,
But no-one would tell me where you could be found.

She replied:

āna al-ḥājja bint ‘īssa
fi al-ḥusn ḥuẓt al-tmāyim
nikhḍār nwalli srīsa
we nustir ‘al kull kān tāyim
lukān mūsh yiqūlu al-ḥājja bint ‘īssa
fi al-ḥijj na‘mil nbāyil

I am the pilgrim daughter of Issa
My beauty is flawless and my fame spread afar
Had I not feared disgrace, the mere sight of my face
Would distract the poor pilgrim away from God's grace.

The marriage: The story ends with the customary tight-knit closure of wedding celebration and wedded bliss expressed in a formulaic passage.

*'Amlu il-mitfarrḥāt, seb'a ayyām we seb'a lyiāli, la min yunfikh
we la min yutbikh kān fi dār al-ṣulṭan. we 'āshu fi al-thabāt we
al-nabāt ḥatta mātīt we māt*

The wedding was celebrated seven days and seven nights, when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. And they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

If one considers the intonation alone, we find that the tape recording makes it clear that Sa'diyya, when reciting the formulae, actually pauses and raises her voice. This clearly indicates the narrator's own awareness of narrative stages. The frame does strongly suggest that she uses the formula to indicate the existence of distinct stages of the narrative. In this narrative the central events are formulaic.

In summary, the use of formulae has a structural force; it helps the narrators and the speakers alike to divide the story up into semantic segments and therefore control the progression of the narrative.

7.6. Asides

One further story-telling strategy emerges in the corpus: the use of asides. The use of asides is a distinguishing feature of the art of Arabic story-telling. It is referred to as *Uslūb al-Istitrād*, and has distinguished major Arabic books such as *Kalīla we Dimna* (Ibn al-Muqaffa'), *al-Bukhalā* (al-Jāḥiẓ) and *Alf Layla we Layla*.

In this collection the narrators favour the use of wordy descriptive and analytical asides. Interludes are interposed to describe (i) particular scenes in detail in the narrative, i.e. an engagement ceremony (tale R2), (ii) remembered events that took place in the narrator's own past in connection

with a similar happening in the story (tale S20), or (iii) a reference to the present socio-cultural context (tale K1). What is the rationale behind this strategy? Story-telling research assumes that the use of this strategy is a deviance from the norm of narrative (Bennet 1989).

7.6.1. Particular scenes

In the 'Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), Ghāya takes delight in describing in detail the layout of the bride's trousseau:

uṣḥna we kisān, sarvīs mākla lwi kanz, servīs khamsīn qaṭ'a kristāl, duzān n-ḥāṣ, dbash al-kujīna, maqfūl we kiskās we tnājar frushāt maṭrūza; ghurzat ḥsāb we ghurzet Nābil, we appliqué, we fleur de lys mzāyynīn bi grābit ghabra, riduwāt ḥrīr, we ṣurmiyyāt.....ḥasilu wlād 'Aysha...

New plates and glasses, Louis XV dinner service, the fifty piece set of cristal glasses, the fifty pieces of copper kitchen ware, *couscous* steamer, pots and pans, embroidered bed sheets, (cross stitch, Nabel stitch, appliqué, fleur de lys), decorated with pink ribbons, silk curtains and cushions....anyway, 'Aysha's children...."

A further example is found in 'Shādli Ben 'Ādli' (tale R13). The newly wedded heroine is about to enter her new palace, which turns out to be the interior of a traditional Beldi house according to Ghāya's description:

Dakhlit tilqa wuṣṭ al-dār ṣuddār rkhām marmār we khaṣṣa, il-byūt qbu we m-qāṣar we ḥwānit ḥajjām, bnāk mafrūsha we ṣormiyyat tidhri...ḥasilu

The courtyard was paved with translucent marble, with a fountain in the middle, the rooms were vaulted with inner chambers and bed alcoves, upholstered divans with cushions...Anyway...

In the two tales Ghāya holds up the progression of the plot and interposes descriptive interludes with little immediate relevance to the narratives. The effect is that of a camera focus or a cinematographic technique of a 'still shot', appearing on the screen, before the camera moves on. Then she resumes her narration: anyway....

As well as adding impact, on these occasions the technique is an effective device for self-assertion and self-promotion. The *trousseau* being described in the first example belongs to a Beldi bride and the house to the Beldi. Ghāya almost describes her own *trousseau* and house and shows off her bourgeois Beldi class. The two episodes are told for self-enhancement. Ghāya is indirectly saying 'this is me', and this is 'our house'. Or perhaps she is showing her ideal of a house and celebrating the traditional Tunisian architectural patrimoine in the face of modernisation. Despite the changes, Ghāya's memory has remained 'lively' and intact. She is recounting her marriage; her childhood. Both examples reflect her intimate knowledge of women's domestic sphere and the specialized vocabulary of the domestic arena.

7.6.2. Events in the past

One example is found in 'the Sparkling Maiden' (tale S20). According to Beldi tradition, the young bride's hair would be cut for the first time to signify literally the end of her spoiling by her parents. Sa'diyya said on the occasion of cutting the bride's hair in the ceremonial ritual of *qaṣṣān al-Dlāl*, that her hair had never been seen before. She added: "when I was

young I remember being slapped by my mother just because I ventured to cut a fringe which was the fashion at the time. They used to be tough with us; ..anyway..... "

This meta-literary addition, 'when I was young..', is clearly self-referencing and has an autobiographical dimension. Sa'diyya is recounting an episode of her own past. She reveals and offers herself to me to bridge the personal distance of the performance situation. This shift from the present to the past, from the impersonal to the personal, from the imaginative to the actual has a specific effect: it enables the narrator to support her narration; as she moves to the centre and promotes herself in her own voice through a platform provided by the tales, she thereby is able to release some of the adolescent resentment expressed in the above aside.

This background information is a useful avenue to gain insight into the world and the world view of the narrator. Discussing American stories in conversation in relation to their tellers, Polanyi states: "We can examine each one of the propositions or statements in the tale with an eye to understanding what the story tells us about the teller's world" (Polanyi 1981: 108).

The tales the narrators like to tell and their digressions/ asides provide both useful information about the narrators themselves and their material and ideological world, as I have indicated.

7.6.3. Present context:

She became a famous singer like say nowadays *Şūfiyya Şnādaq*, by the way they now refer to her as *Şūfiyya Şnādaq*anyway(tale K1)

Khira was telling a tale about the separation and the reunion of a loving

couple. Towards the end and close to the recognition/ reunion sequence, she inserts this 'still shot' to refer to a contemporary Tunisian star and manages to joke about her: "They now call her *Ṣūfiyya Ṣnādaq*" (tale K1). In Arabic, *ṣnādaq* means 'boxes' referring ironically to the padded dresses the singer wears in her shows. The purpose could be to reclaim the attention which the story teller feels has been diverted away from her by the narrative character, i.e. the singer, but also to move to the front and criticize a contemporary singer, as a way of minimizing the present and glorifying her past. The tale is a vehicle of social comment in its essence. Humour is also purposely used by Khīra to project her literary product. Asides are thought to be peculiar to women and considered a deviation from the norm of storytelling. Bennet argues that "once one forsakes preconceived ideas about what 'good' story telling 'must be' these behaviours, too make sense" (Bennet 1989: 168). Such meta-literary additions enrich the oral text. In her book *Oral literature in Africa*, Finnegan states that "Oral literature has different potentialities from written literature and additional resources which the oral artist can develop for his own purposes." (Finnegan 1970: 9). One of the main characteristics of oral literature is its verbal flexibility and openness which allow a perpetual creation of new features. Ghāya, Sa'diyya and Khīra manipulate this flexibility to expand, embroider and suit their inspiration. Past and present background information, personal experience make up the material on which they draw the originality of their inspiration and the enriching of their texts. In the words of Finnegan, "stories are capable of infinite expansion by narrators, as they are sewn together in one man's imagination" (Finnegan 1970: 387). Lord (1960) has shown that the 'performer' of an oral literary work is at the same time its creator, for every performance occurs only once and forms a new creation.

7.7. The diminutive

A close survey of the tales confirms that the use of the diminutive is one of their most striking features. The language used by all narrators is prolific in the use of the diminutive in connection with heroes and heroines, houses and various objects. In Tunisia, linguistic studies of men's and women's language substantiate that the diminutive is used almost exclusively by women (Cohen 1972; Trabelsi 1988). It is not the purpose of this analysis to give an exhaustive study of this female linguistic characteristic, but rather to find out the rationale behind its substantial use in female tale-telling.

In Tunisian Arabic, *tasghīr*, 'diminutive' is not obtained by suffixation as in many languages but by internal modification. The diphthong [ay] is added in the middle of the root. It is appended to substantives and adjectives, i.e. *b a b / b a y y i b*, 'door/little door', *miskina/msaykna*, 'wretched/little wretched'. The word modified in this way conveys various feelings and attitudes of the speaker. In Tunisia and in every-day discourse, the diminutive form of words is stereotypically associated with femininity and is used not only for size but also to express different feelings, ideas and reactions of the speaker, but mainly affection and endearment (Trabelsi 1988).

In the material under study we note that the narrators append the diminutive to general objects and situations, in expressions of time and in relation to different characters to express various attitudes towards them, i.e. affection and compassion, sorrow, empathy, mockery and scorn, as I shall demonstrate.

7.7.1. In general situations

The material under study is prolific in the use of diminutives appended to general objects and situations, i.e. *frayda*, 'little bracelet', *shbaybik*, 'little window', *dwayra*, 'little house', *kwayyis*, 'little glass', *twaywla*, 'little table', *brayrka*, 'little cabin'.

The diminutive is perhaps used here to express the wish of the narrators to express a closeness with the familiar items of their everyday world. They use it as a further strategy to win the audience's attention by appealing to the aesthetic notion that 'small is beautiful'. In the 'Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2) 'Aysha was asked the following question: 'What makes a table beautiful?' She answered: *mghayrfātha*, 'its little spoons'.

The use of the diminutive emphasizes the relation of the narrator to her product: it is an indication of an appropriation of the discourse. Women's speech is full of this form especially when they are talking to children and babies. The presence of children among the audience is a factor which is very likely to influence the choice of linguistic forms the narrator employs in the deployment of her art.

7.7.2. In expressions of time

The diminutive is further used in expressions of time. Examples are numerous, i.e. *mdayda*, 'a little while' (tales S1, S20, S11, S10; R1, R2, R6), *nfayyis shharr*, 'a little half a month' (tale S30), *nhayyrayn*, 'two little days' (tale R2). The diminutive is perhaps used here to express the wish of the narrators to shorten and abbreviate the time they are talking about as a technique in tale-telling in general, because the time they are describing is not chronological.

7.7.3. In the narrators' attitudes

The primary use to which the narrators Sa'diyya, Ghāya and Khira put the diminutives is for the expression of affection and compassion towards specific characters in their narratives.

7.7.3.1. Affection and compassion

In 'The fisherman's Daughter' (tale S9), Sa'diyya introduces the fisherman's daughter as 'Aysha, then later in the course of the story she uses the diminutive of name and refers to her as 'Awaysha, 'little 'Aysha'. 'Awaysha, 'little 'Aysha', does not imply that she is little, but rather it is an expression of the tenderness and compassion that she arouses in her. 'Aysha is an orphan ill-treated and starved by her step-mother. Once she was ordered to grind a *wayba*, 'a hundred kilos', of wheat, on the terrace overnight. On that occasion Sa'diyya relates as follows:

'Awaysha msaykna hazzit shkāyar al-qamḥ we ṭal'it li al-ṣṭaḥ ta'fis fi dmay'ātha.

'little 'Aysha', the poor thing carried the bags of wheat and went up to the terrace holding back her 'little tears'.

In 'the Frivolous' (tale S22), Sa'diyya relates the story of two girls who in the absence of a guiding hand, their mother being dead, grew undisciplined and arrogant. She relates as follows:

ḥatta wiṣlu 'amurhum khumstāsh we al-bnayyāt msayknāt yirkbu 'lā ḍhurāt b'aḍhum we yaṣīḥu 'ala ṭūl ṣūṭhum, shkūn yitkallam al-ummayma fi al-jabbāna

Even when they reached fifteen the little girls, the little poor ones would still ride on each other's shoulder, shouting at the top of their voice, lacking a mother's guiding hand, 'their little mother', being in the grave.

The use of the diminutive in the above examples is to convey affection and compassion. The narrator makes her feeling clear by the epithet *msaykna/msayknāt*, which follow the name 'Aways^{ha} and the little girls . The epithet, *msaykna*, 'poor little', plural *msayknāt*, is perhaps a reflection of Sa'diyya's delicate sensitivity towards orphans having lost her own mother when she was young.

In 'Qamar ez-Zamān' (tale S8), at one point in the story, Sa'diyya relates the sickness of the two separated lovers:

'They took to bed, he *mrayyīḍ*, 'little sick', in one place and she *mrayyḍa* 'little sick', in another'.

Mrayyīḍ/mrayyḍa , the diminutive form of *mrīḍ*, 'sick' conveys again pity towards the characters, as Sebei explains. "Veut-on parler d'un malade, tout en s'apitoyant sur son cas? Au lieu de *m'rīḍ* on emploiera le diminutif *m'rayyīḍ*" (Sebei 1985: 302).

Ghāya also does not fail to express affection and pity towards Šābra (tale R1) who lost her children one by one and did not utter a word of complaint:

al-mghaybna, 'the little unfortunate', endured with no word of complaint, such was *bakhtha* 'her lot'.

7.7.3.2. Sorrow

In Qamar ez-Zamān (tale S8), at one point in the narrative Sa'diyya reports the death of an old man as follows:

Al-shwayyib, 'the little old man' grew sickly and died

Al-shwayyib is not a little old man, but the 'much cherished' because he was so generous and kind towards the dying youth Qamar ez-Zāman, who sought his help

7.7.3.3. Empathy

In 'the Vizier's Daughter' (tale R2), Ghāya relates the story of 'Aysha, the high-spirited, cunning young woman who refuses to submit to a man and claims women's superiority in wit and intelligence. As the narrative advances Ghāya shifts from 'Aysha to 'Awaysa, 'little 'Aysha', and uses various diminutives: *wlaydāt*, 'little children', *mghayrfāt* 'little spoons', *ubbayyib*, 'little door', *ukhayyāt* 'little sisters'.

He came to see her the following day and passed her a loaf of bread through the window and called her:

"Aysha"

She answered "Yes"

He asked: "What makes a room beautiful?"

'Awaysa answered: "Its curtains."

He asked: "What makes a table beautiful?"

She answered: "Its *mghayrfātha*, 'little spoons',"

He asked: "What makes a woman beautiful?"

She answered: "Her *wlaydātha*, 'little children',"

"May you never have any of the three."

With that he left. As soon as he left 'Awaysa opened *al-ubbayyib*, 'little door', which led to her parents' house. She ate, laughed with *ukhayyātha*, 'her little sisters', and came back just before the king was due.

In the above example it is very obvious that Ghāya empathizes with 'Aysha and her independent spirit in answering his questions. We note here the narrator turning into an actress and endorsing the role of her heroine. This reinforces the liveliness of the oral.

'Fṭayṭma' (tale R4), relates the plan of revenge of a young bride over her authoritarian exploitative in-laws. *Fṭayṭma*, 'little Fātma', does not imply that she is little, but is rather an expression of empathy that she arouses in Ghāya. Likewise, *al-knayyna*, is not 'the little daughter-in-law', but the admired outspoken woman.

One day, the two women decided to go to the *ḥammām*, 'Turkish bath' and asked Fṭayṭma to cook them a nice thick *mḥammas*, 'soup'. *Al-knayyna*, 'the little daughter-in-law' took a big cauldron and emptied into it the whole year's provisions of *mḥammas*.

Ghāya clearly empathizes with Fṭayṭma and takes delight in her plan of revenge against her in-laws. Having herself undergone the same injustice, she is enjoying her own fantasies.

7.7.3.4. Mockery and scorn

In 'the Silkweaver and his Neighbour' (tale S12), a young woman tries to seduce her neighbour, a silkweaver only to get a free golden striped *fuṭa*, (a kind of African wrap). She went to see him made up and perfumed and sat inside the shop watching the weaving in progress.

Ukhayyna, 'our little brother', impatient to eat the fresh fruit, went on with the weaving as quickly as he could.

A note of mockery and scorn is discernible in Sa'diyya's use of the diminutive *ukhayyna*, 'our little brother'. A more appropriate translation would be, 'the stupid little fool/chap', an indication that she is enjoying herself at the expense of men, echoing a common strategy amongst women's gatherings of achieving superiority over men.

More common than this pejorative usage is the use of the diminutives to convey notions of affection, compassion and endearment and a degree of subjective involvement, as I have tried to demonstrate.

It is my view that the use of the diminutive is an expression of the narrator's sense of aesthetics and an indication of her deep appropriation of the discourse.

In order to establish and maintain the contact with the audience, the narrator uses 'sweet talk' to create an intimate atmosphere and an idealized world. The use of the diminutive has the effect of bridging the gap between the narrated event and the story-telling by reaching out phatically to the audience. Finally the use of the diminutive is a distinctive feature distinguishing the female discourse. By imbuing this form with emotion, women are able to mark discourse and appropriate it for their own use.

7.8. Concluding remarks

Women's oral narratives revolve around the following devices: formulae and images drawn directly from their physical and social traditional roles, asides; the narrators intruding on the story, speaking in their own voice, creating a platform for describing their Beldi environment, and expressing their own views, frustrations and resentments; and a pattern inherent in the language itself: the diminutive. These are distinctive features characterizing the female tale/discourse. By imbuing this form with their emotions, their experiences as women, and by putting their personal marks and affixing their signature to their words, they are able to appropriate discourse for their own use.

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APPENDIX I

THE LIST OF STORIES BY SERIAL NUMBER AND TITLES

The appendix contains the full list and the English translations of the stories discussed in the body of the thesis.

KEY

R. Stands for Ghāya

S. Stands for Sa'diyya

K. Stands for Khīra

SERIAL NUMBER	TITLE	PAGE
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R1	ŞĀBRA	252
R2	THE VIZIER'S DAUGHTER	256
R3	THE VIRTUOUS	264
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GHĀYA'S REPERTOIRE

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there was a king who had a daughter called Şābra who was of exceptional beauty, exceptional wisdom and exceptional patience and modesty. When she came of age to get married, he put up a sign on the door of his palace, which read: "I would marry Şābra to whoever gave three loads of gold as a bride-price. One for her beauty, one for her wisdom and one for her patience" This put off many suitors. One day, as he was sitting in his palace on the verandah, he saw the sea fill up with ships. The vizier said to him "If they are warriors coming in peace, we have no provisions for them, and if they have come to fight, we have no means to fight back." The king told him "Go and see what they want and come back." So the vizier went to see the captain of the ship and asked him if they came in peace or war. The captain answered "We haven't come to fight, we have come seeking kinship with his honour the king". The vizier asked "Do you know the conditions? The captain said "We do, and we have brought everything we need in the ships." The vizier asked "Who do you want her for?" He said "For Prince So-and-So." They went to see the king and asked for his daughter's hand in marriage. The wedding was celebrated, Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house.. Then he invited them to be his guests for three days and three nights as was the tradition. Eventually the marriage was concluded, and on the third day of the visit, a new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed, the prince instructed the bride that she was not to take anyone with her except her black maid, Dāda. So he took his new wife and Dāda and they boarded the ship heading for his father's land. When they landed, a carriage took them to a far-away palace. The palace was magnificent; the courtyard was paved with marble, with a fountain in the middle, the rooms were vaulted with inner chambers and bed alcoves, upholstered divans, but there wasn't a soul there. He showed her the kitchen and the provisions and everything she needed. Dāda cooked the dinner, they ate and went to bed. The next day, Şābra got up and saw to the housework herself as if she had never been a princess. Time passed, and Şābra conceived a child. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tautening skin on bone. When Şābra was seven months' pregnant, it was announced that war had broken out, and that the prince was to lead the troops. Before he left he told her "Your child is due next month; may God be with you. I have asked an old lady who lives round the corner to come and keep you

company until you have the baby. I have provided linen, cotton and silk for you to prepare the baby's layette". With that he left.

The old lady came to keep her company every night. One night, God willed it, her hour came and Şābra went into labour and gave birth to a baby boy as beautiful as the moon. Praise to God who created him with such a beauty. The baby crawled and toddled. Held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. When the prince returned victorious from the war his son was three years' old. Dāda suggested she would take him to meet his father and the mother agreed. She bathed and dressed the child up and put on his royal golden bracelet. The maid took him to the ship. The streets were decorated and music was playing to celebrate the victory. Everybody came to congratulate the prince; the viziers, the courtiers. When the prince saw the child he asked Dāda "Is this my son?" She replied "Yes, master". He kissed him, then took him and threw him into the depths of the sea. Dāda lost her senses and went back home, wailing. She found Şābra dressed up in her best clothes, perfumed and made up, waiting for her husband. She asked what was going on and the maid related to her what had happened. She answered "Don't say a word. The master has been away for three years and we shouldn't cause him any trouble or discomfort him. It's his son and he is free to do as he pleases with him." So the maid kept quiet.

şābra had the great virtues of humility and modesty, *she is a woman such is her lot.* So when the prince arrived at the palace she welcomed him with great joy and made no mention of her son and showed no sign of grief. Five years passed and şābra conceived again. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tugging of skin on bone. She was seven months pregnant when the prince had to go and lead the troops into battle again. The same old lady living round the corner came to keep her company until she gave birth to a second bouncing baby as beautiful as the moon, Praise to God who created him with such a beauty. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. When he was two years' old, the prince came back victorious and Dāda suggested she should take his second son to meet him, hoping that this time he would have learnt the importance of a child and wouldn't treat him the same as the first. But when the prince saw his son he took him and threw him into the sea. Again, Dāda went back home wailing, and the mistress of the house asked her to keep quiet and not discomfort the master.

After five or six years śābra conceived again and the prince had to lead the troops into war. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin tautening on bone. She gave birth to a girl as beautiful as the moon, praise to God who created her with such a beauty. The baby girl crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The prince came back after two years, victorious, and Dāda suggested that she would take the baby girl to meet her father, hoping that he wouldn't do the same with her as with her brothers, because she was a girl. The girl was bathed and dressed, and taken to meet her father. But when he saw her, he kissed her and threw her into the sea. Śābra showed no sign of grief and uttered no word of discontent.

Śābra lived with the prince for fifteen years. She was now forty. The prince addressed her one day saying "You are old now, and you can't conceive any more, and I love children. I would like you to find a bride for me. I have provided a carriage to take you and Dāda to look for her. I have one condition. She asked "What is it?". He answered "I want a girl as beautiful as you are, but eighteen years younger."

She wrapped herself in her white silk veil began her search from house to house. When she was asked who she wanted the girl for, and answered that it was for her husband, all the women insulted her: " Shame on you! How could you be such a fool looking for a bride for your own husband." Śābra was subjected to every humiliation. For a whole year she had to go out every day and come back late in the afternoon with sore feet and dizzy head. She said to him one day "No luck I've seen them all...short, tall, beautiful, but I haven't been able to find anyone exactly like me. He told her "I understand the old lady who lives at the end of the street has a beautiful daughter. Go and ask for her hand and accept any bride-price she asks."

She knocked on the old lady's door and asked to go in and see the daughter. She stood marvelling at the girl's beauty and asked for her hand for her husband. When she said it was for her husband, the old lady exclaimed "What? Are you serious?" She begged her to accept and explained she would give her a basket of pearls, a basket of diamonds and a basket of rubies as her bride-price. The old woman agreed and Śābra heaved a sigh of relief.

The prince brought in builders to transform the palace and build on four identical rooms. He had them decorated and furnished exactly in the same way. He had her prepare the cake for the wedding celebrations and asked her to help him dress in

preparation for the ceremony. She did so. He then told her to go and bring the bride. When she came back with the girl, he asked her to give him away by placing her hand on his head and taking him to the bridal chamber as was the tradition. This she did, and then offered them the traditional sweet drink. As she did so, the end of her scarf brushed the candle flame and caught fire. She quickly took it in her hand and put it out, saying : "You killed my children and burned my flesh and blood. Now I have a rival, my patience is exhausted and my wisdom has run out." He stood up and kissed her on the forehead, saying "You were good-mannered, you never raised your voice, may the womb that bore you be blessed, Come with me to the hallway". *The woman who is patient will build a happy home. All sacrifice is good.* She went with him, to find three handsome young men. He told her "Here are your own children, and the third is your son-in-law. The bride is your daughter. I want you to go and take the carriage and bring your daughters-in-law."

The order was given to celebrate the three weddings. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. Later he told her: "We are going to start our marriage anew. Don't think that I have emptied my father's treasury for nothing. I saw your beauty from the start, but how could I test your patience and resignation? " There is no resignation with a rival, and no patience until the loss of a child.

And they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

THE VIZIER'S DAUGHTER (R2)

God is omnipresent.

Once upon a time there lived a king (there is no real king but Allāh) who had a vizier who was so close to him that he had the final say in everything. His privileged position made him many enemies and 'as whoever is fortunate is envied' (Arabic proverb) they went to set the king's mind against him, saying that he was corrupt and became rich by taking bribes. "His house is better than yours," etc Eventually the king was turned against him and decided to find a way to get rid of him. One day, he decided to take him as usual for a drive. They got into the carriage and set off. They went on until they reached Mornag or Al-Muḥamadiyya. They found the locals lounging around making tea, as usual. The teapot was bubbling on the brazier. The king addressed the vizier, saying "What is the water saying?" The vizier answered "Does the water really speak?" The king answered "Yes, it does." The vizier went on "How come?" He said "Because."

He granted him three days to give him the answer, otherwise he would be beheaded. The vizier went home, sad and heavy-hearted. The eyes are a jar and the lap a pitcher. His daughter 'Aysha who was dear to him and he to her noticed his mood and enquired "Father, what's wrong? May God protect you. I am ready to die for you. "

He answered "What can I say? I think my hour is drawing near."

"May God protect you! Life spans are in God's hands" He continued "The king has been set against me," and told her what had happened. She answered "Is that all?" He answered "What else? Does water really speak?" She answered "Yes, it does." He asked "How come?" She answered "laugh your morose ideas away and tomorrow God will fulfil our wishes and yours. In three days I will give you the answer."

For two days he was happy and jolly, eating and having a good time. A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. she gave him the answer. "I am water pouring from the heavens, making the earth smooth and giving life to the plants that give you warmth in the cold." He went to see the king and gave him the answer... He said "Fine, you have saved your skin."

Time passed, but the king's mind was still turned against the vizier. He asked him to go for a stroll with him. They walked and walked until they came to a pile of marble stones. They found one piece more beautiful than any they had seen before. The colour was white and pink and grey. He asked him to pick it up and make out of it

forty uniforms for his guards within three days, otherwise he would be beheaded. The vizier went back home, sad and heavy-hearted, the eyes are a jar and lap a pitcher. He said to his daughter "You found the answer for me last time but I don't think you can this time. He has asked me to make out of this marble forty uniforms for the guards." She said "Is that all? Don't you worry". Laugh your morose ideas away and tomorrow God will fulfil our wishes. In three days' time I will give you the answer." On the following day she asked her father to let her have the carriage to go for a drive. She got in and set off for Kelibia, where the beach is wide and the sand shines like silver. She filled her embroidered handkerchief and went back home. She said to her father "Go and see the king and tell him that the uniforms are ready. I have tried all the haberdashers, Jews and Muslims, in all the souks of the medina but I couldn't find anyone who could have the trimmings ready in three days. Since you have the authority as king, call them and ask them to supply the trimmings."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The vizier took the hankerchief filled with sand and told him "The uniforms are ready but we are running late because of the trimmings. Call the haberdashers and ask them to supply them. He called them all, Jews and Muslims. The Jew said: "Can we make trimmings from sand?" The vizier asked: "And can we make uniforms out of marble?" They all went out. The king addressed the vizier, saying "Again you have saved your skin."

Time passed and again the king was still not satisfied. One evening, as they were sitting on their balcony, he told him "I grant you three days to bring over food that has never been cooked by fire borne on a tray on four cows without spilling it." Again the vizier went back home, sad and heavy-hearted, his eyes are a jar and his lap a pitcher, and related his anxiety to his daughter. Again 'Aysha quelled his fears, saying: "laugh your morose ideas away and tomorrow God will fulfil our wishes and yours, I will accomplish it within three days". She asked him to let her have the carriage and the maid to go to their country estate. A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She set off. When she arrived, she waited for the sheep to come back from grazing and chose the youngest lambs. She had them slaughtered and asked for three bags of lime and a bag of stones to build a hearth. On the third day she cut up the meat and prepared it for different dishes. She put it in clay pots, covered them, placed them on the hearth and poured water on the lime beneath them. In a couple of minutes the meat was ready. She served it in a *Louis Quinze* dinner service.

He asked her "Now that the meal is ready, who is going to carry it?" She answered "That's very easy, go up to the corner and stop four 'Arab, 'peasants', they will be

dirty, raggedly dressed with no hat or shoes, and ask them the following questions; their age, which day they were born, what is today's date, month and year. Whoever is unable to answer, bring him over. He is a cow. He said "Fine". He went up to the corner and waited for the first bedouin passer-by and asked:

"What's your name?"

The man answered "'Abdallāh." (Slave of God).

"Come on, we're all slaves of God. Tell me your real name.

"Muhammed."

"Peace be on him."

"How old are you?"

"God knows. I'm as old as I am."

"When were you born?"

"God knows."

"Which day of the week is it?"

"How should I know? I'm not a wage-earner waiting for pay-day."

"Which year is it?"

"God knows."

Before long he had found four people. He took them to his daughter and said "Here are the four cows you want."

She put the tray of food on their heads and covered it with an embroidered silk cloth, and asked him to take the whole thing to the king. The king asked the vizier "What do you take me for? Are these cows?"

The vizier answered "Ask them their age... They can't tell you.

"What year is it?....They can't tell you.

"Which day of the week? ...They can't tell you.

"Which month is it?They can't tell you.

Wouldn't you call them cows?" He said "Indeed they are. Good for you." He tried the food and found it the best he had ever tasted. He ate his fill, then asked the vizier "now , tell me who is helping you? Otherwise you will be beheaded. This isn't all your own work."

He answered "You are right. If one can get by with telling lies, one does better by telling the truth. It's my daughter who always saves me." The king asked "Would you give her to me in marriage?" "I would give her to you to be your slave, but I need to consult her." He went back home and told his daughter that the king had asked for her hand. She answered "I don't think he really wants to marry me. I can see what he's up to. He wants to take his revenge.."

"Are you sure?" he asked. She said "Yes, I saved you from death, and now he wants to kill me." He said "May God protect you. I wouldn't give you to him." She

answered "No, I will marry him. I know how to deal with him." He answered proudly "I know you would." She continued "On one condition. You must build me a secret tunnel between our house and the palace."

Work on the tunnel started as soon as she got engaged to the king. By the time the wedding approached, it was ready. She had two keys for the tunnel door. The order was given to celebrate the wedding. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. On the wedding day 'Aysha was bathed and dressed and taken to the bridal chamber, as all brides are. When the king arrived, he took her to a small empty cell with just a chair and a window. She sat on the chair all night. The king came to see her the next day and passed her a loaf of bread through the window, calling "'Aysha!"

She answered "Yes, master."

He asked "What makes a room beautiful?"

She answered "The curtains."

"What makes a table beautiful?"

"Little spoons."

"What makes a woman beautiful?"

She answered "Her children."

"May you never have the joy of any of the three." With that, he left.

Her cell was bare, she had only a loaf of bread to eat, and her marriage was unconsummated, so how could she have children?

As soon as he left, she opened the door to the tunnel which led to her parents' house... She ate, laughed with her sisters, and enjoyed herself. Shortly before the king was due, she went back to her cell and sat waiting for him. He brought her the same food and asked the same questions. Several months went by in this way; the king would bring her the same food and ask her the same ritual questions, and 'Aysha would answer in the same way. One day he came and told her he was going on a pleasure trip to Sfax, and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. 'Aysha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man, gathered together provisions and all her heart's desires and started her trip to Sfax, travelling night and day, emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king arrived, she

dressed herself in her best clothes, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the middle of her tent within sight of the king who, seeing her beauty, *as men can never resist women*, asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells salted beans to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling doughnuts!" The vizir answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" The king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a plate of salted beans and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the beans to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to sleep with the woman. *After all, she was legally his wife*. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal armband with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate, laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due.

The king arrived, gave her her sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions

Aisha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tautening skin on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Tūr. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The child was put in the care of a wet-nurse, then a tutor who was entrusted with his religious education and general knowledge.

Time passed. One day the king came and told 'Aysha he was going on a pleasure trip to Bizert and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. 'Aysha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man and started her trip to Bizert, travelling night and day. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king

arrived, she dressed herself in her best clothes, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the middle of her tent within sight of the king who, seeing her beauty, asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells chickpeas to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling chickpeas" The vizier answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" The king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a plate of chickpeas and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the chickpeas to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to spend the night with the woman. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal chain of office with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate, laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due. The king arrived, gave her her 'sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions

'Aysha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tautening skin on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Şür. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The child was put in the care of a wet-nurse, then a tutor who was entrusted with his religious education and general knowledge.

One day he came and told her he was going on a pleasure trip to Kairouan, and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. 'Aysha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man and started her trip to Kairouan, travelling night and day. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king arrived, she dressed herself in her best clothes, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the

middle of her tent within sight of the king who, seeing her beauty, asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells doughnuts to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling doughnuts!" The vizir answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" The king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a tray of doughnuts and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the doughnuts to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to spend the night with the woman. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal ring with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due.

The king arrived, gave her her 'sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions: "What makes a room beautiful?"

She answered "The curtains."

"What makes a table beautiful?"

"Little spoons."

"What makes a woman beautiful?"

She answered "Her children."

"May you never have the joy of any of the three." With that, he left.

'Aysha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tautening skin on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Bint frūkh al-Rūm. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The child was put in the care of a wet-nurse, then a tutor who was entrusted with his religious education and general knowledge.

One day, news reached 'Aysha that the king was going to marry his cousin. She asked when the bride's trousseau ceremony was to be brought. They told her Thursday. She bathed her children and dressed them and had each one wear one of the king's royal insignia. She asked Dādah, her maid to take them to the king's palace. She instructed

her children to mess things up in the palace and if they were reprimanded they should answer that it was their father's house and they had every right to do as they pleased. The bride's trousseau was brought: *New plates and glasses, Louis XV dinner service, the fifty piece set of cristal glasses, the fifty pieces of copper kitchen ware, Cuscus steamer, pots and pans, embroidered bed sheets(cross stitch, Nabel stitch, applique, Fleur de lys decorated with pink ribbons, silk curtains and cushions....* Anyway, the children did as instructed, broke the bride's new plates and glasses, and used the embroidered silk cushions as horses, and whenever anyone reprimanded them they answered again "It is our father's house and we have every right to do as we please." The bride's mother was horrified and asked for the bridegroom to come and see for himself what was going on. When he came and saw them, he recognised his ring, armband and chain of office, and it dawned on him that that was one of 'Aysha's ruses. He quickly went to see 'Aysha and told her "You've taken me in again." She said "Of course I have. Don't you see that I saved my father, so how could I not save my own self? He asked her "What about my wedding tonight?" She answered "Go and see your uncle and tell him that you have a chest and that you have lost its golden key. You asked to have a new silver one made, but in the meantime you found the one you had lost. Ask him what you should do." He went to see his future father-in-law and related the story to him. He answered "I can't see why you should have a new key made since you have found the old one." The prince said "Keep your daughter; I have found my wife."

That night's celebration became 'Aysha's postponed wedding. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house, and 'Aysha was finally united with her husband and children

And they all lived safely and procreated until death did them part

THE VIRTUOUS (R3)

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there was a merchant who had a boy and a girl. The girl was a few years older. One day he fell ill and sensed that his hour had come. So he called his daughter and told her. "Aysha, I think my hour has come. I want to ask you to look after your younger brother. I'm leaving you my shop; there is hidden in the store-room a big jar full of gold coins. Don't mention it to him until he comes of age." She said "Don't talk like that; you'll live a long time yet." But he died the following day and was buried. She was left with her younger brother to look after and bring up. Three or four years passed... She asked him one day: "If I borrowed a hundred dinars from our neighbour, what would you do with it?" He said "I would buy a spinning top, a balloon and toys." She said to herself "He's still young."

Her brother was now fourteen. She asked him again one day "If I gave you one hundred dinars, what would you do?" He said "I would buy a bike." He was now eighteen. She asked him the same ritual question "If I gave you a hundred dinars, what would you do with it?" He answered "I would open my father's shop again, get rid of the old stock and start with what is saleable. I would also contact father's old fellow-merchants to learn the trade from them." She said to herself "Now my brother is grown-up. " She told him "I will go and borrow some money from our neighbour Auntie Fāṭma and when you begin to make a profit you can pay her back."

After he left she went to the store-room and took a hundred dinars from the jar, which she sealed up again. When he came back she gave him the money. The following day he went to the souk and opened the shops. He threw out what was damaged, lawn and taffeta and silk, shook out and aired what could be saved and displayed the rest for sale. He went to see one of his father's fellow-merchants and asked him to teach him the trade. The man was delighted with his initiative and praised him for not letting his father's trade die out. Time passed and he soon became a master-merchant in the souk, employing many apprentices. After a while, he paid the money back to his sister.

One day, as he was working in his shop, a man passed by selling a bird which could sing and tell stories. He said to himself "Why not buy it for my sister to keep her company?" He bought it, and bought for it a golden cage and two bowls, one gold and one silver, and took it home to his sister. He filled one bowl with rose-water and the other with birdseed. Of course, the bird could talk. Each and every day the sister

would get up in the morning, see to her household chores and then sit and listen to the bird entertaining her with stories. She grew very fond of the bird.

One day, a group of fellow-merchants decided on a business trip *In olden times, merchants would be away for a whole year.* He was asked to join them. He went home and informed his sister about the trip. She said to him "How can you think of leaving me alone, a helpless woman?" He answered "Such is life ... I have to make a living. After all, you've got your bird to keep you company." She said "May God protect you." She prepared a year's provisions for him. A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. He bade her farewell and left.

The expedition reached Baghdad. They would buy and sell during the day and gather at night to play cards, dominoes and chess, and to chat. One evening the topic of women's fickleness was raised. One of them said "No-one could even dream of seeing my sister's fingernail." Another added "It would be easier to reach heaven than to catch a glimpse of my sister." The brother intervened, saying "No matter what you say, there will never be a woman as virtuous as my sister. She has never stepped across the threshold and no man has ever seen her toe." One of them answered "Who do you take her for! Let us bet on it. The brother said "Done! Let us play a game of cards." They played, and the other man won. He said to him "Does she have any distinguishing mark on her body?" The brother answered "Yes, she has." The other merchant asked "What if I discovered it?" The brother answered "Do as you please."

The merchant took ship and sought out an old witch, told her the story and asked her to help him reach the woman, otherwise he would lose all his fortune and become a slave to the brother. They came to an agreement, and he directed her to the woman's house.

The old witch dressed herself in a green robe, covered her head with a green shawl and painted her stick green and went to see the woman. She knocked on the door and posed as her aunt, but the woman was surprised to hear that she had an aunt. The old witch explained: "Your father, God rest his soul, cut me off from my sister, so we weren't able to see each other. Now he is in God's care, and I have forgiven him." She started to cry and sob. The woman was taken in by her sweet words and let her in. She entertained her to tea, and then she left. The old witch would come and visit her every day. One day, she came and invited her to attend her supposed daughter's *henna* ceremony. The woman answered "You know my brother is away and I cannot go out in his absence." The witch replied "How can you disappoint your cousin like that? Don't you want her to be happy?" She eventually talked her into it. The woman put on

her finery, took out her silk and silver veil and was about to go out when the bird intervened: "Mistress, put your silken veil away in the chest and your gold in your jewel-box, and let me tell you the story of *Qāsim* and *Qwīsim*." The old witch said "Is this the time for telling stories? Damn the bird!" The woman answered "I must listen to my bird's story." The old witch left in a rage. The bird started his story. "Once upon a time there was a maker of oriental shoes who was famous in the souk. One day the king came to see him and asked him to prepare a hundred pairs of slippers for the following morning. The shoemaker closed his shop and sat inside, weeping. Around midnight he was still weeping. Suddenly, the wall parted and there appeared a maiden as beautiful as the moon. She greeted him. He asked her "Are you human or a genie?" She said "A genie." He asked "What do you want?" "Give me your food and get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow you will find all the slippers ready." He replied "Help yourself and welcome."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. As he got up he was delighted to find all the slippers ready. Each and every day he would buy a doughnut and offer it to the genie who was making the slippers for him and leaving him a gold coin every night. Soon the days smiled to him and he made his fortune. He moved into a grand new house, married off all his daughters and placed all his sons in jobs. One day, one of his fellow shoemakers enquired about his sudden wealth. The shoemaker related the story to him. The man said to him "How can you give away your own food to a genie? Next, she'll be wanting your soul." The following morning he got the doughnut ready but when the genie appeared and reached out for it, he slapped her hand. She said to him "You will regret it," and she went back in, closing the wall behind her. He waited for her for a month, but she never appeared again. He took two stones and started to beat himself on the temples until he died of remorse saying "Time has turned against me". The bird continued "Destiny struck the man cruelly and he became poor again, Mistress, if you leave your house you will regret it too." She folded her veil, placed it in the chest and declined the invitation.

The old witch left in a rage. She went to see the man who was waiting to carry the woman off on his horse, and related what had happened, saying "It's an impossible task. Did her brother mention anything distinctive about her?" He answered "Yes, she has a birthmark." She replied "Don't you worry. I will tell you what it is."

She came to visit her on a scorching hot afternoon and suggested they should take a refreshing shower, explaining: "I can see your hair is dirty. Let me give you a good wash, scrub your back and pour the water over you, just like your mother would have

done., God rest her soul." And she started to cry. The woman heated some water and they went into the kitchen. As she was taking off her clothes, the old witch noticed her birthmark: a slice of watermelon, green on the outside and red in the middle, with black pips, visible on her thigh. As soon as she saw it, she took to her heels to find the man. Immediately he heard, he went back to find the brother and tell him that he had had his sister, proving it by describing the mark on her thigh. "From now on I claim your fortune and you become my slave as agreed."

The brother opened a doughnut shop to survive, dressed in rags and fried doughnuts, barefoot.

The woman was surprised at the old witch's disappearance but the bird told her "You are so naive." Time passed until one day he told her "Do you know that my master is now in Baghdad, a slave to a fellow-merchant, making doughnuts for a living?" She immediately disguised herself in men's clothes, prepared provisions for herself for a full year and asked her bird if he wanted anything from there. He told her "After you save our master, and on your way back across the Red Sea, call out three times for Morjān, my cousin, and tell him : "Yaqūt greets you and asks you how he can escape from his cage and leave this foreign land."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She gathered together provisions and and all her heart's desires and took ship. When she reached Baghdad she sought out her brother and enquired what had happened. He related the whole story to her. She told him all about the old witch. She redeemed her brother and they sailed away together. When they came to the Red Sea, she called out: "Morjān, Morjān! Yakut greets you and asks you how to escape and leave this foreign land." Morjān replied "Why don't you just bang your head against the wall?" *Obviously the woman couldn't understand the message.* When they arrived back home the bird was delighted to see them. After they had a meal and drank tea, the parrot enquired "Did you talk to my cousin?" She answered "Of course I did." He asked "What did he say?" She replied "Bang your head against the wall." They had a good night's sleep. The following morning she got up to find the parrot dead in its cage. She wailed and cried and mourned him "My poor parrot. He was my only companion and adviser. The brother intervened "All this for a bird!" *As you know, men can't bear misery.* "I will buy you another one." He reached out for the bird and threw it on the rubbish heap. The parrot flew off and settled on the edge of the terrace, and said "Mistress, here I am." She said "My little bird, come back to me." He replied "I finally got what I wanted: my own freedom. I can't come back to you. I was hurt to hear your brother say he would buy you another parrot," and he flew away.

There we left them and we have never seen them since.

Once upon a time there was a merchant who married a girl chosen by his mother. *In olden times, in-laws were respected, and girls were expected to behave modestly in front of them. Mothers-in-law particularly were very powerful, and took control of the whole household.* His mother had two daughters who were spoilt and hard-to-please. The father-in-law was rich and every day he would send to the house two baskets full of provisions. The mother-in-law and her daughters took charge of the kitchen, thereby ensuring the best of the food for themselves. The newly wed daughter-in-law was given the dirtiest tasks to do. At dinner-time, *women used to eat separately from the men,* they would look for any excuse to send her on pointless errands: "bring some water," "You forgot the olives", while they ate their fill. When asked she would say "Oh yes, I've had quite enough to eat, al-Ḥamdullah," despite her hunger.

The young bride grew thinner and more listless every day, but she was a girl of great modesty, she never complained to her husband, as she was the daughter of a respectable Beldi family which considers it most important for a girl not to show arrogance or disrespect towards her elders. Her husband saw that she was pale and subdued and always went to bed early. He reported it to an old fellow master-merchant, who explained : "She can't be getting enough to eat." Surprised, the husband exclaimed "How come? There's plenty of food prepared every day." The old man said "Put her to the test. Take a cock, pluck it completely except for one feather, and throw it into the courtyard. If she isn't really hungry, she will come out of her room and laugh at this marvel. If she is, she will stay in her room and ignore the whole thing." The young merchant did as he was told. His mother and sisters rushed laughing out of their rooms to see what had fallen from the sky. The young bride, however, did not move. The husband concluded she must be hungry.

He went back to the old man and recounted what had happened. The old man enquired if she had ever complained. The husband replied "Never." The old man told him "Go and buy some cakes from the suq and smuggle them into the house. Make sure she eats them. When she does, she will remember the cock and laugh. The young merchant brought the cakes to his wife and fed her.

After eating, she started to laugh, remembering the cock. The husband, recalling the old man's words "She is hungry", asked her "Now tell me what's happening. You're not eating properly, are you? She said "It's your mother and sisters... I can never

manage to eat as they always find things for me to do at meal-times." The husband told her "Then we must do something about it. We'll pretend to have an argument and I will repudiate you. You can go home to your parents and I will teach my family a lesson."

The following morning, they started to argue, and the raised voices brought the rest of the family running. He pretended to be furious and pronounced "You are divorced." The young bride took her belongings and went back to her home, explaining the subterfuge to her father.

A week later, his mother suggested she should find him another wife. The young merchant said that this time, he would make the choice himself. Now, there was a young tomboy called Ftaytma living nearby. He went to see her and asked her to help him take revenge on his family, and he would pay her. They would pretend he had chosen her. To their surprise, his mother and sisters were sent to go and ask for her hand. Her own mother was away, so she received them herself. They asked "Where is your mother?" She answered "She went to deliver the soul from the soul." "Where is your father?" "She answered "He's gone to accompany a soul who will never return." "Where is your brother?" He's gone to fight with one who never fights back." The women were nonplussed and uneasy. When Ftaytma broke wind, it was the last straw, and the women left, affronted.

They rushed back to the house and cried "What kind of a wild woman are you marrying? When we asked about her mother, she said she was out delivering a new soul; when we asked about her father she said he was accompanying a soul who would never return, and when we asked about her brother she said he was out fighting one who never fought back. As if that wasn't enough, she farted!" The son laughed to himself and explained "Her mother is a midwife, her father an undertaker and her brother a hunter. I have chosen her and we must lose no time in writing the marriage contract."

The first day Ftaytma came to their house, she took charge of the kitchen. She would pick out the best of the provisions and eat while the others watched. When they sat down to eat, she found any excuse to send her mother- and sisters-in-law in turn to run errands.

Tired of being treated like this, her mother-in-law complained to her son and asked him to repudiate this wild woman and take back his meek first wife. The son said "I can't do that any more," thinking to himself "I must make sure you learn your lesson."

One day, the women decided to go to the Turkish baths and asked the daughter-in-law to prepare some nice thick mhammas soup for their return. After they left, F̣aytma took a big jar of grain, emptied it into a huge cauldron, added tomatoes and water and put it on the fire. When the women came back from the baths, they were outraged to discover she had used the whole year's provision of *ṃhammas*. They complained to her husband again, but he told them he was not ready to divorce her.

On another day, the women went to the baths again and asked her to look after her sick father-in-law while they were out. F̣aytma asked two notaries to come to the house, promising them each a purse of gold if they would draw up her father-in-law's will in which he left her his fortune. As her father-in-law took the first mouthful of his dinner, she said to him "Be careful! I think there's a hair in your mouth." He stuck out his tongue; as he did so she swiftly cut it off. When the notaries came to write the will, he was unable to object. The women came back from the baths and discovered the tragedy. Shocked, they begged the young man: "repudiate the horrible F̣aytma and take back your former wife, and we would gladly serve her." So his former wife was brought back and regained her rightful position.

BĀBA TURKI (R5)

Once upon a time there was a middle-aged man who was married to a beautiful young wife. The wife had a lover. When Bāba Turki was out at work, his wife would entertain her lover. This went on for some time. One day, Bāba Turki came back unexpectedly to fetch his umbrella as it was raining. What was she to do? Her sister was visiting at the time, so together they decided to hide him in the *maqsūra*, 'inner room'. Bāba Turki came in and sat on the seat in the living-room between the two women. The wife's sister said "Why don't you tell Bāba Turki?" The wife asked "What about?" "The neighbour" said her sister. "Well," addressing Bāba Turki, "the neighbour's wife entertained her lover while her husband was out at work. Bāba Turki said "Damn her! I would have killed her if she were my wife. What happened?" His wife answered "Her husband came back unexpectedly one day. Taken aback, she and her sister hid him in the *maqsūra*, then they each took hold of one edge of a sheet and made a passage for him to pass through, saying 'Come out, come out, wherever you are!'"

As they demonstrated to Bāba Turki how it happened, the lover made his escape. Bāba Turki rose to his feet, cursing "Damn her husband for a cuckold! If it had been me, I wouldn't have been taken in. I would have killed both of them and drunk a glass of their blood!"

THE PEASANT (R6)

Once upon a time there was a bedouin chief who had a son, but he was lazy and feckless. One day, fate caught up with his father, and he died. On the fortieth day, a group of thieves came to rob the tribe, knowing that this time they would be powerless to resist. Hearing voices, the chief's widow tried to scare them off by calling out. The son shrank from tackling them, and so the thieves took what they could carry and left.

The following day, the widow scolded her son, but he answered "What did you expect me to do? God allotted their share to them." One day, a wedding was going to be celebrated. In his lifetime his father, as a good horseman, would participate in the *fantasia*. The mother asked her son to put on his father's costume, mount his horse and honour his father's name. He was supposed to take seven women singers with him; 'Aysha his cousin, 'Aysha his next-door neighbour, 'Aysha his neighbour round the corner, 'Aysha his maternal cousin, 'Aysha his father's sister's gaughter, 'Aysha his mother's brother's daughter, and 'Aysha his wife.

When he arrived, 'Aysha his next-door neighbour was kidnapped. He said "I don't care about her, but woe betide you if you touch 'Aysha my neighbour round the corner." She too was kidnapped. The young bedouin said "I don't care about her, but woe betide you if you touch 'Aysha my cousin." She in turn was kidnapped. One by one, all the 'Ayshas were kidnapped, including his wife. So he threw away his sword, cast off the costume and went back home, bare-headed and barefoot.

His mother received him wailing and saying "You have dishonoured our tribe. There is no place for you here any more." She gave him his share in the inheritance and he left. "I'll go to Tunis and have a good time," he said to himself.

On arriving in Tunis, he didn't know where to go. Then he had an idea. "I should go and see *Ummi* 'Aysha the go-between," he thought. Then he approached the first passer-by he met, and it was the *qāḍi*, a Beldi from the bottom of the jar wearing a silk *jibba* of extreme elegance. "Can you tell me where to find *Ummi* 'Aysha the go-between?" he enquired. "God forbid!" exclaimed the *qāḍi*, invoking God the Merciful. The young bedouin approached a tattooed man and asked "Can you tell me where to find *Ummi* 'Aysha the go-between?" he asked. The other bedouin answered "Indeed I know her." And he pointed to a house further up the street.

Ummi 'Aysha welcomed him and gave him some water to wash his feet. "Meanwhile, I shall prepare you some food from your provisions," she said. She opened his bag. To her surprise, it was full of gold, not wheat. She gaped, and went back to him, saying "You must go and wash in the baths." "What baths?" he asked. "Well, the public baths where anyone can go for a wash and massage," she answered. "But wait here."

She went to the old city and bought him a fine *barnūs*, 'cloak' and *jibba*. She tied them up in a cloth, added a silver box containing jasmine-scented *tfal*, 'washing-clay' and gave him two gold Louis from his own money. One was for the bath, and one for the barber, she instructed. The young bedouin went to the bath. At first he was received coolly, but when he showed the gold coins, the attendants rushed to serve him.

Ummi 'Aysha the go-between took good care of the young bedouin for seven days and seven nights, feeding him and looking after his needs and teaching him Beldi manners. One day, she said to him "I must find you a fine bride." He said "That's a good idea." She went on "Take this apple. Go and find a girl you fancy, throw your apple at her, and I will go and ask for her hand for you."

The young bedouin went to Bab Souika. It was summertime, and the barrow-boys were selling beautiful melons. "Why don't I buy one of those instead of the apple?" he thought. So he bought one, and went and stood in front of the Turkish baths. All kinds of girls came and went; short and tall, dark and fair, but not one appealed to him. The *qāḍi*'s pregnant wife, a Beldi from the bottom of the jar, came out of the bath wrapped in her silk veil. He immediately took a shine to her, and threw the melon, which hit her on the belly. This sent her into labour and she gave birth on the spot. The bedouin was arrested. *Ummi* 'Aysha took three gold coins, filled two bags with fruit and provisions and went to see the *qāḍi*. "Your honour is of a higher rank than he is. Forgive him." And she gave him the gold coins and the bags. So he set him free. The young bedouin went home with *Ummi* 'Aysha.

A week later *Ummi* 'Aysha suggested that this time she would choose him a bride. So she went to ask for the hand of a daughter of a modest Beldi family. She had a large marble courtyard in the middle of her house, which she cleaned with spirit of salts. Now it looked like a blue sea. She built him a nice extension and furnished it with silk curtains and fine carpets. Meanwhile, she instructed the young bedouin how to behave in Beldi circles; first to drop his regional /G/ and pick up the /Q/, to use a knife and a

fork, to wait to be served, to start a meal with *bismillāh* and to show deference to the in-laws.

On the wedding day, the bridegroom wearing his *jibba*, *barnūs* and *shashiyya stambūli*, 'Turkish fez', went to the bride's house and sat down to eat with his guests. It was the tradition to have *bazīne* 'a rich, nutty cream' on that day. She instructed him not to use his fingers while among the guests. She saved him a small portion, saying "After your guests leave, you can eat with your hands, and feet, if you want! Use the bathroom to relieve yourself instead of going outside." *Ummi* 'Aysha tried to think of every way in which he might disgrace himself and teach him to avoid it. But the young bedouin, to everyone's disgust, used his fingers to eat the *bazīne*.

The bride was brought and sat in the place of honour with her guests. The young bedouin came with his party. He stood at the door, and mistook the newly-cleaned courtyard for the open sea. He said "The deep blue sea lies between us. I can't reach you." From behind, *Ummi* 'Aysha gave him a shove. "Go on, it's not the sea." After some hesitation, he went in and joined his bride in the bridal chamber.

The bridal bed was decorated with silk curtains and cushions. The peasant gazed in wonder and marvelled at the drapes and curtains decorating the walls and the cushions. He mistook them for the donkey's panniers and played with them. Then his attention was drawn to the pearl necklace the bride was wearing. Mistaking it for his donkey's leading chain, he pulled it, singing "Jingle, jingle, goes my donkey's chain!" The beads fell to the floor. He was apologetic and asked for a needle and cotton to re-thread them for her. The young bride realised she was married to a boor. She gave him the thread and a needle and sat crying. The bridegroom's party were banging on the door, as was the tradition, to drag him out. "I'm still struggling to put it in the hole!" he exclaimed.

Confused, the groom's friends pushed open the door. They were shocked at what they saw. He was sitting on the floor, threading the pearls. They dragged him out and all sat down to the wedding dinner. *Ummi* 'Aysha stood watching from a corner. When the dessert was served, the bedouin first used just one finger, then gestured to *Ummi* Aisha to ask if he could use the others as well. *Ummi* 'Aysha scratched her cheek in protest, but the bedouin went ahead anyway with both hands, with the result that the *bazīne* went all over his *jibba*. A little while later, he needed to relieve himself. He had never seen an indoor-toilet, *Ummi* 'Aysha was once again on hand to instruct him to use the bathroom.

The bride's mother and close relatives stayed with her as was the tradition until the seventh day. The mother, bitterly disappointed by the match - her daughter, a fine *beldi* girl, married to a boorish bedouin - fell ill and took to her bed. *Ummi 'Aysha* told the bedouin "I think you should pay a call to your ailing mother-in-law." He answered "I was thinking of it myself." *Ummi 'Aysha* replied "Make sure you take her something nice, and most of all, weigh your words carefully."

The bride, finding her groom utterly repugnant, seized on her mother's illness as a reason to go back and stay with her.

The bedouin went to visit his mother-in-law. She was lying in her bed, seriously ill, with the curtains drawn and no-one daring to disturb her. As soon as he came in, he said "Is she dead yet?" The visitors were all shocked. *Ummi 'Aysha* dragged him out, scolding him for his tactlessness.

The following day *Ummi 'Aysha* was summoned. They said to her "As we met in a spirit of goodwill, so must we part. Oil and water don't mix. We are not compatible; the marriage must be ended." *Ummi 'Aysha* replied "I do apologise. They are ill-suited in every way." Then she went back home and told the bedouin to send the divorce papers, which he did straight away.

Our story has come to an end, may we have a fine crop next year.

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there lived in Tunis a childless king who had always yearned for a child to fill his house with joy. He prayed day and night to God to grant him a child. One night an angel came to him in a dream, asking him "Do you want a daughter with a misfortune but who survives, or a son with a misfortune who dies?" He turned on his side and exclaimed "God forbid!" But the angel appeared again, explaining "I am a messenger sent from God to fulfil your wishes." His wife the Queen noticed his agitation and enquired what was the matter. He recounted what he had seen and she advised him: "You are King, you have authority and can overcome any misfortune" So when the angel returned, the King asked him for a daughter.

He did so, and his wife conceived. Three moths of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tautening skin on bone. The baby's layette was prepared. . The Queen went into labour and gave birth to a bouncing baby girl as beautiful as the moon. Praise to God who created her with such a beauty. For forty days mother and baby were pampered and spoilt. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. "What name shall we give her?" the king enquired. "Rdāḥ", said the queen. Out of concern to have her secluded, the king built a glass palace for her private use and to prevent any misfortune from befalling her. (But whatever is written shall be) Thus the girl grew up knowing nothing and no-one but her mother and father and the maid. One day the princess tapped on the floor, which broke open, being glass. For the first time ever she saw the outside world through the hole and people going to and fro. "So there are other people besides my parents!" she exclaimed. As she marveled at the sight, she heard a bedouin woman chanting beautifully some *dhikr*, 'liturgical singing'. She invited her to her palace.

The request was granted and she came up into the glass palace. When she saw the princess' long flowing hair, she praised Allah and said: "Glory to Allah the exalted creator! What beautiful hair you have! The only thing missing is musk oil to perfume it." "Where can one get it?" the princess asked. "Your father is the King and could get you anything." With that, the woman left.

The following week, Rdāḥ's face turned as pale as straw and she slept in a sick bed. Her father was summoned urgently to visit her. When he came and enquired about the cause of her illness, she answered petulantly "I want some musk oil". No sooner had

she uttered this than the king slapped her on the face angrily, saying "Who put that idea into your head?" She didn't answer, fearing to tell him about the woman coming to visit her. Her father came back to the palace, angry and full of foreboding. The queen met him, inquiring about her daughter's health. He answered "There is nothing wrong with her health, but I fear this is the beginning of her *miḥna*, 'misfortune'". "Tell me what has happened". He answered "Your daughter is now asking for musk oil to be brought to her. You know how its perfume can be smelt for miles around and it is bound to attract attention to her". "Have you gone mad?" the queen exclaimed. "How could she know about it?" asked the king. The queen answered "Our daughter is well-read. She must have read about it in her books. You shouldn't have hit her. Get it for her and apologise". So the king sent his vizier to get it and took it with him when he next went to visit her.

Ḥmid al-Hilālī, a member of the Beni Hilāl tribe, was already married to a girl from the same tribe. One day, he heard the rumours about a woman of exceptional beauty living in Tunis. He said "I will find her".

He was a handsome Bedouin Arab. He put on his barnūs and headcloth, picked up his rifle and set off. He travelled and travelled and travelled, filling one land and emptying another, and no land can be filled except by our dear Almighty God, until he came to a group of Bedouins. A woman among them asked "Have you come for us, O handsome young man, or are you visiting other lands?" "I have neither come for you nor am I visiting other lands. Tell me about Rdāḥ, who has driven suitors mad with her beauty". She answered "An evil fate must have driven you all the way. If you seek Paradise it is close at hand; but Hell lies at the end of the path you have chosen". He answered "Had I wanted wheat I would have eaten it at home". He turned his horse and rode off. He travelled and travelled and travelled, filling one land and emptying another, and no land can be filled except by our dear Almighty God, until he came to another gathering of Bedouin. An old woman, seeing his beauty and thinking of him as suitable suitor for her young daughter, enquired "O handsome young knight, have you come for us, or are you heading for other lands?" He answered "I have neither come for you nor am I heading for other lands. Tell me about Rdāḥ, who has driven me mad". She said with a wink "Paradise is close at hand; but Hell lies at the end of your path." He said "Had I wanted wheat I would have eaten it at home". And he rode off.

As he drew closer to Tunis, the perfume of musk oil now wafted stronger and stronger and Ḥmid's heart throbbed more wildly. He arrived at Bab Bḥar, in the centre of the

city. He approached an old woman and enquired "What is this perfume?" She answered:

"It is the perfume of Rdāḥ, Mother of Beauty.

Her breasts are like two golden apples,

Her locks, dressed in sixty-six plaits,

Are perfumed with musk oil.

Her lips are coral-red and her teeth white as pearls.

Her cheeks are like pomegranates.

She is not as tall as a palm tree nor too short to be seen.

Her skin is neither as white as milk nor brown as a berry."

On hearing her description Ḥmid's heart pounded with love and tenderness. He asked where he could find her. The woman answered "Just there," pointing to the glass palace. Ḥmid turned his horse and headed for the palace. When he came to the palace, he found a horse-trough and a bench. He tied up his horse and lay down to rest on the bench, reading a book.

That day, Rdāḥ had decided to bathe, so she sent Dāda to fetch some water and heat it for her. When Dāda reached the spring outside the palace she was amazed to find a handsome young man mounted on a horse. She stood marvelling at his beauty and forgot about the water. When she came to her senses, she hastened to draw the water and return to the palace. Rdāḥ scolded her, asking "What kept you?" Dāda replied "A handsome young knight, mounted on a fine horse, who fixed me with piercing eyes until I could bear his gaze no longer." Rdāḥ told her "Go and ask him where he comes from." So Dāda went and asked him "Who are you and where do you come from?" He replied "Give my greetings to your mistress and tell her I am Ḥmid al-Hilālī of the Beni Hilāl tribe, whose prowess in battle is legendary." Dāda went back and reported what she had heard. Rdāḥ covered herself in her wrap and went down to look. Their eyes met. He told her "I was destined to come all this way to woo you, despite warnings. My heart will always beat for you, even if I should repent." She replied "Your folly is boundless. How dare you ask for a treasure you can never aspire too, a mighty tree you could never climb." On hearing this, he turned his horse to leave. She added "Are you angry or running away? Anger is unworthy of noble people." He replied "I am neither angry nor running away, and indeed, anger is unworthy of noble people. It's of no consequence; only Destiny can decide. If Destiny delivers you into my hands, even if you resist, you are bound to give in."

She invited him to follow her, and they spent three days and nights together... On the third day she gave him her necklace as a token of her troth and sent him to see her father.

Ḥmid took the necklace and travelled with it to his own land. He went straight to see his cousin and related to her what had happened. She told him "Bring her to me so I can rejoice at your marriage." He gave her the necklace and told her "I have to go and settle some tribal matters. Give this to 'Ammār and Khalifa and send them to ask the king for her hand on my behalf."

Ḥmid went back to see his wife, who had heard of his plans, and asked her to prepare some *mesfūf*, 'sweet semoulina and milk', quickly before he set off. She got it ready and served it to him. Usually she prepared it with butter, sugar, nuts and milk, but this time she served it plain and he remarked on it. Nothing is better than sweet *mesfūf*, 'semoulina' to give strength to face the day, but yours today is bitter." She replied "No-one can either bear or want a cup of bitterness. You are taking another woman in my place; we must go our separate ways."

His cousin took charge of the painting and decoration of the house in readiness for the wedding. She summoned 'Ammār and Khalifa and gave them the necklace and asked them to go and visit the king in person. They put on their best clothes and set off. They arrived in the city and headed for the palace, asking for an audience. "Have you come to make a complaint?" They replied "Certainly not. We have come on a private matter." So the king was informed that two Bedouin peasants wanted to see him. He told the footman to show them in after he had finished with the legal affairs of the kingdom. As soon as they were shown in, 'Ammār and Khalifa greeted the king and threw the necklace before him. The king was taken aback. *Tradition had it that whenever a daughter gave away her necklace, it meant that she accepted the suitor.* Beside himself with rage, the king summoned the vizier and told him to throw Rdāḥ out in rags, like a dog.

Now Dāda came to see her mistress, scolding her for her ingratitude, saying "My lord has spoilt and pampered you in a glass palace, away from prying eyes, and you pay him back by choosing an uncouth Bedouin peasant." When Rdāḥ saw the two men, she understood. She found herself outside, dispossessed and stripped of all her belongings.

Rdāḥ, being the king's daughter, had always lived a sheltered and leisurely life. The two men took her and on the way tried to molest her. She resisted, but they took turns in abusing her. She was of the city and not used to the scorching sun. She got sunstroke, and by the time they reached the village she was almost dying. His cousin immediately took care of her and nursed her. Ḥmid al-Hilālī sent a messenger to announce his return. By now Rdāḥ was dying. 'Ammār and Khalifa came to visit her. She threatened them, saying "You won't get away with this. Ḥmid al-Hilālī will avenge me." They said "What arrogance! Let her die. When they went out, she called Ḥmid's cousin and told her "I have a secret; I want to confide it to you. The cousin said "Tell me; I promise to keep it forever." She said to her "A bird of the land can not live over the sea, and silk and cotton are for the nobility and merchants. I am the softness and you are the dagger. We are poles apart. That is my real grief. I fell sick from no illness and he is finished without being killed." And she sighed her last. *It is hopeless silk and rags don't mix, that is why I am so worried about Layth.* He will not be happy.

Ḥmid's cousin grieved and wailed over her death. She buried her in an inner room and decided to find him a new bride. She had many slave girls, all of extreme beauty and different talent: singing, dancing, poetry reciting. She chose the most beautiful and the wittiest and got her ready for the wedding and carried on with the preparations for the planned celebration.

On his return, Ḥmid al-Hilālī went straight to his cousin and asked if Rdāḥ was there. She answered "Indeed, she is to be your bride, just as you wanted." So she showed him to the bridal chamber but when he lifted the bride's veil he turned to his cousin. "This isn't Rdāḥ! Tell me where she is!" She replied "I can't lie to you any more. Rdāḥ died, and I had her buried in there." Ḥmid went to see the tomb, saying: "a thousand fair maidens and a thousand brown would not make me forget Rdāḥ. After Rdāḥ no woman would content me." And he sighed a deep sigh and died.

There we left them, and we have never seen them since.

'Ubeyd Allāh al-Mahdi was strolling one day and came upon a river. He was struck by the beauty of a young bedouin girl who was washing wool there. He struck up a conversation with her and was impressed by her quick wit and charm. He recited: *nasaja al-rīhu min al-mā'i zarad*, 'the wind wove a chain mail out of the water'. She continued: *ayyu rad'in li al-junūdi law jamad*, 'wonderful armour for a soldier if it should freeze!' Her ready answer convinced him that he should marry her. So they were married and he took her to his palace.

One day, after a few months, she came to him, saying "I miss the earth of the farm, and want to feel the soil under my bare feet, and to milk the cow." 'Ubeyd Allāh al-Mahdi gave the order to prepare a room for her with the floor covered in jasmine and rose petals, and to bring her a cow. But al-Rumaykiyya was not satisfied and insisted on the real thing. So she was taken to a farm and enjoyed walking barefoot and milking the cow.

The war broke out and both al-Rumaykiyya and 'Ubeyd Allāh were captured and taken prisoners. In the prison, she said to him "I curse the day I met you. I haven't had a single happy day since." He enquired "Even the day you walked barefoot again?"

THE ENCHANTED MAIDEN (R9)

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there was a man who lived happily with his wife. Years and years passed, but they had no children. They prayed day and night for a child to fill their house with joy. One day, as the wife was preparing a meal a man went past the house selling apples. "Apples to help you conceive!" he was crying. The woman rushed out, saying "Why not try it? I must buy one." So she bought one. Her husband came back from work hungry. He found the apple and ate it. *In olden times, women were shy and wouldn't dare speak of such a thing.* The wife didn't ask him about the apple.

The man's knee grew bigger and bigger until the skin was so taut it shone. "Shame on me!" he thought. He took some rags and went into the forest. He sat under a palm tree and cut his knee open. Lo and behold, a baby girl emerged! She was as beautiful as the moon. He wrapped her up in the rags and left her. There was a peahen watching from the tree, so when the man left she came and picked the baby up, and put her with her own young.

She fed her and looked after her. She gave her fresh food and water whenever she brought it to the nest. Thus the girl grew up and reached her fifteenth year. She had beautiful long hair which covered her nakedness. Now the girl would climb down to find food for herself and return to the nest. One day, the prince went out on a hunting expedition and saw her in the forest. "Praise be to God, the Creator of such beauty!" When she saw him, the girl ran away. He followed her until he saw her climb up the tree.

He went back home, his face turned as pale as straw and he slept in a sick bed. As he was the king's only son, all the physicians of the kingdom were called to try and cure him. He was suffering neither from fever nor sweating, so every one of them diagnosed that he was suffering neither from fever nor from sweating, but from depression. An old witch was called to entertain him. She said "What's wrong, my Lord? No-one will deny you any wish. Even your enemy's head would come rolling to your feet. What can I do for you?" He replied "This is a difficult task. She answered "Tell me all about it." He began "I went out to hunt as usual. I saw this beautiful girl and ran after her, but she disappeared into the middle of a tree." She

replied "Is that all? Give me a pottery dish and some barley. I will go to the tree. When I win her trust and you see her come to me, throw your cloak around her."

The old witch went to the forest, lit a fire under the palm tree and sat down to toast the barley using the pottery dish turned upside-down. The girl was watching from the top of the tree. "Turn the dish over! You're doing it wrong!" "How else can I do it? Come down and help me, then." The young girl slid down from the tree and turned the dish over. As she did so, the prince appeared, threw his cloak around her and flung her onto his horse. He took her home and asked his mother to prepare for his wedding the next Friday. He had three wives already. She was young and extremely beautiful and the others were very jealous. The prince was thrilled with his new bride and neglected the others.

One day, he came to his mother and informed her that he was going on a journey. He asked her to keep an eye on 'Aysha, the new bride. He asked his other wives to behave and live in harmony in one house until he came back.

All the wives lived in the same house as they were instructed. One day, as the first wife sat massaging 'Aysha's head, she pulled out a hair and put a pin in its place. These pins were magic. When the last pin was inserted, 'Aysha changed into a bird and flew off. All the wives sighed with relief. "What shall we say to the prince?" One of them suggested "Say she died." So they built a tomb for her in her own chamber.

Now the prince was fond of his gardens, which were planted with roses, jasmine, and other scented plants. He had a gardener who took good care of it, watering and pruning every day. One day, the bird came and asked the gardener "Gardener, gardener, has your master come back?" "Not yet," he answered. She said "May you be turned upside down with your eyes popping and wetting yourself." As soon as she uttered that, the gardener found himself upside down, his eyes popping and wetting himself. The bird then attacked the plants and tore them up before flying off. The following day the same thing happened again.

Time passed. The prince came back. His wives informed him that his new bride had died. They claimed she had pined away with grief at his absence. All the physicians had been called, to no avail. The prince sat every day beside the tomb, weeping and wailing. The vizier warned him one day "My lord, you are neglecting your kingdom and your people, crying over a stone. You must see to your kingdom and to the needs of your people." The prince replied "Life is meaningless without her." The vizier

suggested "Let's go out into the garden for a change of scene." So they went out together. The prince was saddened by what he saw. The garden was parched and the plants dying. He called the gardener. "What happened to the garden?" The gardener replied "Don't ask me. But I would like you and the vizier to come in the afternoon and you will witness yourselves what is happening.

In the afternoon, the prince and the vizier settled themselves on a canape in the garden and waited. Soon the bird came and asked the gardener "Has your master come back?" He answered "He hasn't yet." She said "May you be turned upside down with your eyes popping and wetting yourself." As soon as she uttered that, the gardener found himself upside down, his eyes popping and wetting himself. The bird shouted "My mother craved me but my father bore me. A peahen raised me in the top of a palm-tree. May the old witch be damned for leading me astray." Then she attacked the plants and tore them up before flying off. The prince sat every day to watch the same spectacle. "I must unravel this mystery." He advised the gardener to answer always that his master was still away, if asked.

One day, when the bird came back, the prince got hold of her. He caressed her head, but felt the pins, so he plucked them out one by one, until the last one. As he did so, the spell was broken and a beautiful girl burst forth from the bird. She sneezed, saying "May whoever brought me back to life, live, and whoever killed me, die." Then she related to him what had happened in his absence. "They tortured and tormented me." "Who did?" he asked. "Your wives, my lord" she replied. He answered "They shall be sent away, and you will remain my only wife." So he repudiated the three wives and

lived safely with 'Aysha until death did them part.

God is omnipresent.

Once upon a time there was a childless couple, who always yearned for a child to fill their life with joy. One day a diviner passed by, shouting "Water for the barren! Water for the barren!" The woman heard this and rushed out to speak to the man. "I am barren. Sell me some water, God bless you!" He answered "This water cannot be bought with money, only with a condition: if you conceive a baby boy, it is yours, if it is a girl, then it is mine." The woman had never known the joy of a child, so she accepted. "Agreed!" she said. "Give me the water."

She drank, and conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out, and three months of tautening skin on bone. She gave birth to a bouncing little girl as beautiful as the moon. Praise to God the creator who created her with such a beauty. The baby crawled, toddled, then held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. Time went on until the girl was six or seven. One day, as she was playing in the alley, the diviner passed by again. "Greet your mother from me, and remind her of her vow." The little girl went on playing until it was time to go in, then went home, had supper and remembered the old man. "By the way," she said, "I have got something to tell you." "Something good, I hope" said her mother. The girl went on "An old man with a white turban approached me and asked me to remind you of the vow between you." On hearing this, the mother felt her heart sink and started to cry. She cried and lamented, then gave in to God's command. She said to her "Next time he approaches you, say to him 'Take me with you.'" On the next occasion the old diviner came the little girl did as her mother had told her. He told her "Put your hand in mine and your feet on mine." As soon as she did so, she found herself flying through the air. They flew on and on until they came to No-Man's-Land. They landed near a sumptuous palace. They went through a first door, a second, a third, and so on until they had passed through seven doors. Buk Daḥdāḥ gave her some food and soothed her tears with different toys and presents. Now Aisha grew up surrounded by every luxury. One day Būk Daḥdāḥ informed her that he was to travel to a distant land and gave her seven keys to seven rooms. She was to open all of them except the seventh. "These are the keys for the seven rooms, but you must not open the seventh one during my absence." With that, he left.

'Aysha after a few days felt bored, and started by opening the first room. It was full of rubies. She made necklaces and bracelets, and when the sun set she closed the room

and went away. The following day she opened the second room, which was full of emeralds. She made more necklaces and bracelets, closed the room at sunset and went away. Each room had different jewels and Aisha spent her time exploring and enjoying them.

When she came to the seventh room, she said to herself "By God, I will open it. I can't resist. What else could there be inside? More rubies and emeralds, pearls and sapphires, I suppose." 'Aysha opened the room and to her surprise it was empty, except for a little window overlooking a garden. She looked out. The gardener saw her and said " 'Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ will feed you up, Būk Daḥdāḥ will fatten you, then he will turn on you and eat you." 'Aysha closed the window and sat crying.

Būk Daḥdāḥ came back from his travels and found her face by turns as yellow as saffron and as green as grass. "She must have opened the room" he thought to himself. "So you opened the seventh room." "Yes, I did" she answered sadly. She continued "I opened the window and the gardener asked me "Whose daughter are you? I told him 'Būk Daḥdāḥ's daughter'. He replied 'Būk Daḥdāḥ will feed you up, Būk Daḥdāḥ will fatten you and then turn on you and eat you.'" Būk Daḥdāḥ told her "Next time he tells you that, tell him this:

'Bāba Daḥdāḥ will feed me up,
Bāba Daḥdāḥ will fatten me,
To the Sultan's son he will marry me.
I will kill you on my wedding day,
Use your head for a stool and your skin for a bed.
Your eyes will be my mirror, in which I shall see my face and the back of my head."

The following day, 'Aysha opened the room and went straight to the window. On seeing her, the gardener said:

"Whose daughter are you?" She answered: "I am 'Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ's daughter." The gardener went on:" 'Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ will feed you up, Būk Daḥdāḥ will fatten you, then he will turn on you and eat you." She answered confidently:

'Bāba Daḥdāḥ will feed me up,
Bāba Daḥdāḥ will fatten me,
To the Sultan's son he will marry me.
I will kill you on my wedding day,
Use your head for a stool and your skin for a bed.
Your eyes will be my mirror, in which I shall see my face and the back of my head."

The gardener was shocked and surprised at her answer. He became sad and began to neglect the garden. Now the prince was very fond of the garden and always delighted in strolling around it. One day he went out for a stroll as usual, and was dismayed to find that the garden was in disarray. He enquired angrily: "What's happening to the garden?" The gardener answered: "My lord, it's a mystery. For some time now, a beautiful girl has appeared at Būk Daḥdāḥ's window every afternoon. I ask her: "Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ will feed you up, Būk Daḥdāḥ will fatten you, then he will turn on you and eat you." She answers:

'Bāba Daḥdāḥ will feed me up,
Bāba Daḥdāḥ will fatten me,
To the Sultan's son he will marry me.
I will kill you on my wedding day,
Use your head for a stool and your skin for a bed.
Your eyes will be my mirror, in which I shall see my face and the back of my head."

Now, the gardener was really a sheep who had taken on the form of a man, and when no-one was looking, he browsed around the garden grazing on the plants. The prince was surprised by the news of the girl and decided to put the gardener's words to the test. In the afternoon he sat on a bench and waited. Soon the window opened and a beautiful young maiden appeared. The gardener said: "Whose daughter are you?" She answered: "I am 'Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ's daughter." He went on: "'Aysha, Būk Daḥdāḥ will feed you up, Būk Daḥdāḥ will fatten you, then he will turn on you and eat you." She answered confidently:

'Bāba Daḥdāḥ will feed me up,
Bāba Daḥdāḥ will fatten me
To the Sultan's son he will marry me.
I will kill you on my wedding day,
Use your head for a stool and your skin for a bed.
Your eyes will be my mirror, in which I shall see my face and the back of my head."
With that, she disappeared.

The prince was surprised and exclaimed at her beauty. "Praise to God, who created such beauty. I must make her my bride." He turned to the vizier "I grant you three days to bring me Būk Daḥdāḥ's daughter, otherwise your head will roll." The vizier answered: "Your wish is my command."

The following day the vizier went without delay to ask for the hand of Būk Daḥdāḥ's daughter. Būk Daḥdāḥ said "I will be honoured to give her to the prince, but on certain

conditions. I want as her bride-price seven sets of jewellery: one in gold, one in pearls, one in diamonds, one in rubies, one in sapphires, one in emeralds and one in marcasite." The vizier said: "Agreed!" The order was given to celebrate the marriage. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was prepared except in the Sultan's palace. As 'Aysha was leaving Būk Daḥdāḥ's house for her new home, Būk Daḥdāḥ said to her: "Do not speak to the prince unless he begs you for my sake." 'Aysha promised.

Now the prince had three other wives, and 'Aysha was the fourth. She was young and beautiful, and he immersed himself in her loving company and neglected the others. One day his first wife said to him: "My lord, I want to visit your new bride." The prince answered: "What business is it of yours? Are you in love with her?" She answered: "I want to see her. I have heard how beautiful she is." The prince informed his youngest bride, who welcomed the idea. She gave orders to the servants to prepare a special meal; meat and fish and all good things. The first wife arrived, and they embraced with feigned warmth. They sat down to eat. The table was set with all kind of sweet and savoury dishes: meat and fish dishes, *Briks*, stuffed peppers, varied tajins, *Ragout sucre* and *baqlāwa*. 'Aysha called the servants and asked for the primus stove, a frying pan and some oil. *In those days there were no gas cookers.* The first wife asked, surprised, "What's that for?" 'Aysha answered "There is no sausage on the menu. I must prepare merguez for my dear sister." The first wife protested: "It doesn't matter." 'Aysha answered: "But it does. I must prepare merguez for you." The oil was now smoking. 'Aysha dipped her fingers in the boiling oil and drew out fried merguez, and put it in the serving dish, again and again. They ate, and chatted. Just before she left, the first wife invited 'Aysha to repay the call.

The following Thursday 'Aysha arrived and was received with the same feigned welcome. They sat down to eat. The first wife asked the servant to bring the primus stove, a frying pan and oil. 'Aysha asked: "What's all this for?" "There is no sausage on the menu" replied the first wife. The oil was smoking, and she dipped her fingers in. But her hand stuck to the pan, and burned, and she died instantly. 'Aysha breathed a sigh of relief to be free of her.

In turn, the second wife asked the prince if she could visit his new young bride. The prince answered: "Didn't you see what happened to my first wife?" "She deserved it; after all, she didn't really love her" answered the second wife. The prince went to see 'Aysha and informed her of the visit. 'Aysha welcomed the idea. She gave orders to the servants to prepare a special meal with lots of sweet and savoury dishes. The

second wife arrived and was welcomed just like the first, with feigned warmth. They sat down to eat. 'Aysha called the servants and asked for the primus stove, a pan and some oil. The second wife enquired "What's that for?" 'Aysha replied; "There is no fish on the menu. We must have fish." By now the oil was smoking. 'Aysha dipped her fingers in the boiling oil and drew out huge whole fried fish, which she placed on a big serving dish. The other wife gaped in amazement. They ate, and chatted, and just before leaving, the second wife invited her to return the visit.

The following Thursday, 'Aysha arrived and was received with the same feigned welcome. They sat down to eat. The second wife asked the servant to bring the primus stove, a frying pan and oil. 'Aysha asked: "What's all this for?" "There is no fish on the menu" replied the first wife. The oil was smoking, and she dipped her fingers in. But her hand stuck to the pan, and burned, and she died instantly. 'Aysha breathed a sigh of relief to be free of her.

In her turn, the third wife asked the prince if she could visit his new young bride. The prince answered: "Didn't you see what happened to my first and second wives?" "They deserved it; after all, they didn't really love her" answered the third wife. The prince went to see 'Aysha and informed her of the visit. 'Aysha welcomed the idea. She gave orders to the servants to prepare a special meal with lots of sweet and savoury dishes. The third wife arrived and was welcomed just like the other two, with feigned warmth. They sat down to eat. After lunch 'Aysha said it was the day for the hammam, and invited her guest to accompany her. The third wife said: "What for?" "Just for fun" replied 'Aysha. She called the servants and asked them to bring jasmine-scented *īfal* (washing clay), towels, an incense-burner, silver pattens and a bucket. When everything was assembled, she asked everyone to clap their hands and jump into the well. Everybody clapped their hands, including the third wife and her retinue. 'Aysha joined in, but soon came back up with her servants (with the help of Būk Daḥdāḥ), leaving the third wife and her retinue behind to die in the well.

Thus 'Aysha got rid of all three of them. Time passed and 'Aysha would not talk to the prince. One day, as they were sitting in the courtyard, the pitcher and mop were washing the floor. *In this house, everything worked on its own, with Būk Daḥdāḥ's help, may God protect us!*" The pitcher and mop began to fight. The mop came to complain to the mistress, saying "Didn't the pitcher start it? I was trying to wash the floor and it tipped water on my head." 'Aysha remained silent. The mop continued "Who is in the right? Please mistress, in the name of Būk Daḥdāḥ, answer." 'Aysha replied "Since you are begging me in the name of my father, I'll be the judge. The

pitcher is wrong." Hastily the prince turned to her, saying "Throughout all these years you haven't uttered a word. Please speak, in the name of Būk Daḥdāḥ." She replied "Bāba Daḥdāḥ is so dear to me, and I owe him everything. I promised him not to speak unless I was begged in his name." Suddenly the wall split apart and Būk Daḥdāḥ appeared, saying "My dear little daughter, you did what you wanted with your rivals with my help. I cannot help you any more; you have a husband. I need to go to the holy shrine at Mecca to rest and live there until I die." With that, he disappeared.

‘Aysha and her husband lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there was an old woman who was poor but eked out a living by spinning wool. Each and every morning she would rise early and go to the *suq* to sell her wool. One evening, there was a full moon and it was so light that she thought morning had come. So she wrapped herself in her silk veil and went to the *suq*. But it was all closed. She found four other women who had made the same mistake. So they decided to spend the time until dawn broke together, chatting about their lives. One said "Why don't we talk about the good old days when we used to wear fine clothes even in the kitchen?"

The first one started "I was pampered and spoilt in my parents' house. On my wedding-day I was taken to the bridegroom's house and I sat in the middle of the guests like a queen, with the drums playing. Now in the middle of the court-yard stood an impressive plum-tree with tempting fruit so red that every pregnant woman would crave for them. I did nothing but admire it all evening. The party went on until dawn. When everybody had left and everything had become quiet, I slipped out of the room on the pretext of relieving myself, and picked a couple of plums from the tree. When I was about to eat them, my new husband came out to join me, so I stuffed them in my cheeks. "What's happened to your face?" he asked me. I answered "It's my tooth; it's aching badly." He answered "I'll call the dentist, then." *If she had been clever, she would have taken them out while he was away, but she didn't think of it.* So the dentist came and opened my mouth. He discovered the two plums. My husband nearly died of shame! He paid the dentist and divorced me on the spot."

The second woman said "He had good reason to divorce you. In my case, there was none. On my wedding-day I was taken to the groom's house, and there was a nice strong smell of *mlukhiyya* (a stew made with dried ground leaves like spinach, and meat) wafting around. *Tradition had it that brides were not to eat that day in the bridegroom's house or he would die. It is usually the hannāna, who puts henna on the bride's hands, who brings her dinner in a basket from her parents' house.* The drums were beating, but the smell was so strong that I was obsessed with how to get some of it. When everybody had left and the house had become quiet, I slipped out of the room on the pretext of relieving myself, and went to the kitchen. A big pot full of *mlukhiyya* and meat stood on the range. So as not to dirty my hands, I put my head right inside the pot to eat. Putting my head in was easy... I licked it up until I'd had

enough. When I tried to pull my head out, it wouldn't come. I tried and tried, to no avail. When I failed to return, my new husband came out to find me. He discovered me with my head stuck in the pot. He tried to get me out, but he couldn't. Then his father came, his brother, and his mother. My head wouldn't budge! So the coppersmith was called and melted down the pot to set my head free. My husband paid him, divorced me on the spot and sent me back to my father's house."

The third one said "There was a good reason for it, but in my case, there was none. I got married to a nice handsome young man. We were happy and contented. One day, he came back home with a big red pumpkin and asked me to do a *mitzawra*. I agreed to do it. When he left, I put on my *Khāma and rihyya*, 'wrap and black veil face', put the pumpkin on my head and took it to visit all the saints' tombs: Sīdi Ben 'Arus, Sīdi Bel-Hassan, Sīdi Mehrez, Sayyda Manūbiyya, Sayyda 'Arbiyya, Sīdi Brahim al-Riāḥi, and so on, until the sun set. I came back home and sank exhausted to the floor. When my husband came back he asked "Did you do the *mitzawra*?" I answered "Can't you see for yourself? My feet are sore and I have no energy left. I have visited all the saints, as God is my witness. You told me to take the pumpkin on a visit!" He replied "What are you talking about? I asked you to cook a *mitzawra*. So you've been out gallivanting all day? How could I have honour with my wife *hāmla*, 'promiscuous', all day on the street! You are divorced!" *Respectable women were not to be seen on the street, only prostitutes wander freely.* "So he sent me back to my father's house."

(NB: in Arabic, *mitzawra* is the name of a dish but also means a round of visits.)

The fourth woman said "There was a good reason to divorce you. But in my case, there was none. I had been happily married and contented for some time when my husband came back one day with a cock and told me he had a guest for dinner. He asked me to cook it in its entirety and leave it ready on time. So I took the cock and put it in the pot, whole, feathers and all. I added some vegetables, oil and tomato and steamed the cuscus. When it was ready, I served it in a *tabsi* (pottery serving dish). At sunset he came back from work and asked me if the dinner was ready. Fortunately his guest was waiting outside. I answered "I cooked it in its entirety, just like you wanted." So he lifted the straw lid and discovered the cock with all its feathers, comb and spurs. He hurried out and apologised to the man, saying "I'm sorry, the dinner is not ready. My wife is on her death-bed." Then he came in, divorced me and sent me back to my father's house."

The last woman said "There was a good reason for divorce. In my case, there was none. I was married to a man and we lived in one room. One day he came back with a guest. So he asked me to put on a head scarf and stay in the bed recess out of the way, as was the tradition, so as not to come face to face with a stranger. The two men sat down to eat, and I felt I needed urgently to relieve myself. What was I to do? Now my husband had a nightcap he usually wore in bed. So I took that, and did it in it. As I was afraid it would smell, I threw it out through the curtains, aiming for the courtyard, but I missed, and it landed on the man's face. That was it... He saw the man to the door and came back to divorce me."

With that, the sun rose and all the women sold their wool and went back home.

God is omnipresent

Once upon a time there was an old woman whose husband died and left her with three daughters to look after. Like many old women, she earned her living spinning wool. She was very poor, and if she could afford lunch she had to go without supper, and vice versa.

One day, as she was selling her wool in the market, a handsome young man wearing a jibba and *barnūs* of extreme elegance approached her, saying: "Who spins this wool for you?" She answered, "My daughters, may God bless them." He asked "Would you give me the eldest in marriage?" She answered "But we are poor, and not of your rank." He replied "Only God is truly rich. I still want to marry your daughter." They agreed to celebrate the wedding the next Thursday. He said "I will send a donkey carrying a trunk containing jewellery and finery for the bride. She should mount the donkey and order him "take me back to where you are fed with barley." Before taking his leave of the old woman, the young man gave her a thousand riyals. Thrilled, the old woman hurried to the vegetable market and filled her baskets with every luxury she and her daughters could want.

Arriving home, she was received with great surprise. The daughters exclaimed "Where has all this come from!" She replied "From God the Merciful. By the way, I have given your sister away in marriage. We must prepare for the wedding next Thursday."

The following Thursday, a donkey carrying a trunk arrived at their door. The mother hurried to unload it. Soon the bride was clothed in her wedding dress and decked in the finery the groom had sent for her. She was finally wrapped in her silk veil and sent off on the donkey.

The donkey walked and walked, until he came to an orchard, then a splendid house. He went through the first open door, then another and another, until he had passed through seven doors and came to a courtyard paved with marble. There he left her. The young bride found herself alone in the middle of a beautiful traditional house. She made for the sitting-room, took off her veil and sat down to wait. Suddenly, a donkey's head came rolling to her feet. The young bride screamed with horror. When she did so, the donkey's head blew on her and she found herself back in front of her mother's house, crying and shaking. Her mother and sisters exclaimed "Whatever's

the matter?" She replied "I found myself all alone in a huge house, when suddenly a donkey's head covered in blood rolled at my feet. No sooner had I screamed than I found myself back here." "May God protect you!" said her mother. "After all, we haven't lost anything. The thousand riyals were a gift from God."

Two weeks later, the handsome young man approached the old woman again, asking her for the hand of her second daughter. The old woman acquiesced, thinking that maybe her second daughter was his destined wife. Again he gave her a thousand riyals to celebrate the wedding, and again a donkey came to fetch the bride the following Thursday. Exactly the same thing happened. The second daughter found herself back home again in front of her mother's house.

The old woman resolved not to give her last daughter in marriage if he should come to ask for her hand. But the youngest daughter begged her mother to accept. On the next occasion, the handsome young man came to ask for the hand of the youngest. The old woman accepted willingly, and again he gave her a thousand riyals to celebrate the wedding, and again a donkey came to fetch the bride the following Thursday. The young bride found herself just like her sisters in a splendid house. The courtyard was paved with translucent marble, with a fountain in the middle, the rooms were vaulted with inner chambers and bed alcoves, upholstered with cushions. She took off her veil and put it away in a chest. She found a silver bucket and a golden one which she filled with jasmine and roses. Then she opened the chest of drawers and took out two embroidered towels, and sat down to wait.

Suddenly, the donkey's head came rolling, covered in blood. The youngest daughter exclaimed "God bless you!" and hurried to wash it, and perfume it with jasmine and roses. Then she dried it with the towels and took it to rest in the inner room. Then she went to the kitchen and found that dinner was cooking by itself. She helped herself and sat down to eat her fill. It was almost midnight; she felt tired and weary and went straight to bed.

A new day is born and he who pray for the Prophet will be blessed. when she woke up, she saw the most handsome man she had ever seen dressed in a jibba and burnous leaving the house. She did not utter a word. An hour later, there was a knock on the door. She opened it. Three black female servants came in, saying "We have come to serve you." The three servants each set to a different kind of housework; cooking, cleaning and washing. At noon, lunch was ready. The mistress sat down to eat at leisure. Later, the servants entertained her with stories, songs and dancing until sunset.

At dusk, she heard a voice saying "Put out the lamps, draw the curtains. Your master has returned." Suddenly, the lights went out and the handsome young man came straight into the inner room. The mistress carried on normally, had her dinner and went to bed. Every day she put on a splendid new dress embroidered with sequins and went happily through the same routine, presiding over her household *with no mother-in-law and no burden, a situation to be envied*. She was lucky God had willed it so.

Now let us return to her sisters. On the wedding day, the two sisters waited and waited for the younger sister to return but she did not come back. They were puzzled, and curious to know what had happened. The first week passed, and the second, but still the younger sister failed to return. They were jealous and decided to break up her marriage. They summoned Azūzet es-Stūt may she be damned! and told her "Next time the sultan's wife auctions off her old caftan, bring it to us."

A week later, the old witch came back with a luxurious, expensive caftan. The sisters commanded her to take it to their younger sister, saying "If your husband really loves you, he must buy you this." The old witch did as she was told. She came to the house and knocked on the door. A servant opened it. The old witch explained that she came on behalf of the mistress's sisters and mother to pay her a visit. "Let her in" said the mistress. She was eager for news of her family. The old witch told her all was well, and accepted an invitation to stay for lunch. A large table was set with sweet and savoury dishes. The two women ate their fill, helped themselves to tea and cakes, and chatted. Just before the old witch went to leave, the mistress rose to her feet, went to the chest and filled a cloth with fine clothes, tied it up and gave it to the old witch. The old witch said "By the way, your sisters and mother greet you and say to you that if your husband really loves you, he must buy you this caftan." "How much is it?" the mistress enquired. "Five hundred riyal" the old witch replied, and with that she left.

When the master came back, the woman was low in spirits. She didn't even have dinner. How could she explain this to her husband? He never addressed a word to her. Suddenly she heard him address the lamp "You, lamp, why is your mistress so upset?" The lamp replied "Her mother and sisters have upset her and sown doubt in her mind about her marriage." He replied "Tell her to laugh her morose ideas away. Tomorrow God will fulfil your wishes and ours." As soon as she heard this the mistress was reassured and became her old self again. She sat down to eat. The following day she found five hundred riyals under her pillow.

When the old witch came back she gave her the money. The old witch informed her that her mother was ill. That evening, she informed the master through the servants and sought his permission to visit her old home. He recommended she should take the donkey, look after it well and be sure to return before sunset.

The next morning the mistress took two baskets of provisions and set off. The donkey plodded on slowly until they reached the house. When they arrived, she tied the donkey up, gave him some water and barley and went into the house. She found it full of relatives come to enquire about her mother's condition. She sat down with the women and chatted. One of them said "What is your husband like? Is he handsome?" She replied "I don't know him. He comes home in the dark and leaves before dawn. We don't speak to each other." The women were shocked and exclaimed "How come? How can you live with a man you don't know? How can you live with a man who doesn't speak to you?"

The young woman went back home. The following day she awoke to the news that her mother had died and she had to go back again. The master gave the same instructions, recommending her to take the donkey, look after it well and be sure to return before sunset. But the young woman, distraught at her mother's death, forgot all about the donkey once she had arrived. The children played with it and teased it unkindly. The women enquired again about her husband. "Did you talk to him? Do you know his name?" The young woman said no. That evening, the young woman went home determined to speak to him.

At dusk, she heard a voice saying "Put out the lamps, draw the curtains. Your master has returned." Suddenly, the lights went out and the handsome young man came in straight to the inner room, coughing and unwell. She joined him in the room, enquired about his health and asked him "What is your name?" He replied "What is more important to you, my name or my body?" She insisted "Your name." He repeated his question "What is more important to you, my name or my body?" "Your name." As she spoke, she did not realise that he was being swallowed up by the earth. He repeated the question "What is more important to you, my name or my body?" She insisted "your name." He replied "Shādli Ben 'Ādli", and the earth closed over him. Immediately the three slaves hurried to beat her and cast her out of the house. She put on man's clothes, gathered together provisions and all her heart's desires and decided to look for him

She walked and walked, miles and miles emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until she grew tired and hungry. She found a pool of water, drank from it and washed her face. When she saw her reflection in the water she exclaimed:

"How beautiful I am! But unlucky!" She heard a voice:

"You who are admiring yourself in the water, lift the marble slab and see what's underneath." When she lifted the slab she found a staircase. She walked down and found an extremely beautiful young woman. She enquired:

"What are you doing here?" The young woman replied:

"Don't ask. My father is the ogre. He is coming to visit me today. Come and help me and tell me all about yourself." She agreed to help her and she confided to her the secret about searching for her lost husband. The young woman promised to help her in her search, explaining that her father was the king of the ogres, and that nothing escaped his attention." A huge cuscus was prepared for the ogre. When he came, his daughter hid her in a rolled-up mat, but he sensed a human presence and exclaimed:

"I can smell humans! Come to me, all of my possessions. Each and every one of his possessions rushed to him, except the mat. He enquired:

"Where is the mat?" His daughter answered:

"It is sick and tired out." He answered:

"Leave it to rest." After he had dinner, his daughter came to him and asked:

"Father, have you heard about Shaldli Ben Adli?" He answered:

"What? How did you come to hear that story, buried here under the earth?" He slapped her on the face and put her eye out. When the ogre left, the sister came out of hiding, apologising:

"I'm sorry I got you into trouble." She replied:

"No harm done; I will recover. Take this walnut and go and find my younger sister. She will be able to help you."

She walked and walked miles around until she found a pool of water, drank from it and washed her face. When she saw her reflection in the water she exclaimed:

"How beautiful I am! But unlucky!" She heard a voice:

"You who are admiring yourself in the water, lift the marble slab and see what's underneath." When she lifted the slab she found a staircase. She walked down and found an extremely beautiful young woman. She enquired:

"What are you doing here?" The young woman replied:

"Don't ask. My father is the ogre. He is coming to visit me today. Come and help me and tell me all about yourself." She agreed to help her and she confided to her the secret about searching for her lost husband. The young woman promised to help her in

her search, explaining that her father was the king of the ogres, and that nothing escaped his attention." A huge *couscous* was prepared for the ogre. When he came, his daughter hid her in a rolled-up mat, but he sensed a human presence and exclaimed: "I can smell humans! Come to me, all of my possessions. Each and every one of his possessions rushed to him, except the mat. He enquired:

"Where is the mat?" His daughter answered:

"It is sick and tired out." He answered:

"Leave it to rest." After he had dinner, his daughter came to him and asked:

"Father, have you heard about Shādli Ben 'Ādli?"

He replied:

"You know what happened to your sisters when they asked me the same question. But because you are so dear to me I will answer. Whoever wants to get to him needs one of my robes, one of my sticks and one portion of my supper. The portion is for the ants when they swarm, the stick is to help get through the mountains covered in thorns and thistles, and the robe is to escape from the other ogres." She answered:

"Who cares?" After he left she blew on the pin, which turned into a human being.

After a week, when her father was due to come again, she prepared for him a clean robe, a new stick and new shoes. When he started his meal, she shouted;

"Don't eat that, there's a hair in it." So he spat it out. Then she said to him:

"You must get rid of this old robe and stick. I've got new ones for you." He replied : "You are right, I need to change into a new robe". He took off the old robe and put on the new one and left with the new stick.

She called her out her hiding place and said to her:

"Now you can start your search, take this hazelnut and use it in case of necessity and go , may you be blessed".

She kissed her goodbye and left.

The young girl walked and walked emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God. She came to a mountain covered with thorns and thistles. She struggled through it with the help of the magic stick. Then suddenly she was surrounded by ants. She threw them the ogre's morsel of food and continued on her way. She met with lions and tigers but none of them molested her because she was wearing the magic robe. She walked until she came to a grave where her destined husband was buried, as the ogre had explained to her. She was to cry until she filled seven jars and seven drinking cups with her tears, which would break

the spell on him. She sat down on a bench and started to cry and cry until she filled the first, then the second and so on. She remembered her father's death and cried, she remembered her mother's death and cried, her unhappy days and cried. She cried over her bad luck, her self-sacrificeAs she was filling the seventh, a procession of people passed by and asked for water to quench their thirst. She said to herself "Maybe I should buy a serving-girl to help me through". So she gave them some water and got a black servant in exchange. Explaining to the girl that she was to fill the last jar with tears and wake her when it was full, she laid down to rest. Exhausted by her crying, she immediately fell into a sound sleep. The serving-girl only had to think of her own problems to cry her eyes out and soon filled the last jar to the brim.

Shādli Ben 'Ādli had promised he would marry whoever broke the spell. So when the last tear was shed, the grave opened and he rose from it as beautiful as the moon. He saw the woman lying there, more beautiful than he had ever imagined. He enquired "Who is this?" The black girl answered "A beggar who came to ask for alms". He asked "Was it you who cried over me?" She said "Yes, indeed". He said "Then you shall be my wife in this world and the next".

The sleeping woman woke up to find herself alone. She realised what had happened and lamented her fate. Then she got to her feet and started to walk until she came to a city which was in turmoil with the king's impending marriage, and rumours that the king's spell had been broken by a black girl. She made her way to the palace to ask for food, and was taken on as a maid.

She worked for some time until one day she saw the new bride and recognised her. She decided to take her revenge. She took out the first daughter's gift, the walnut, and broke it. When she broke it, there came out of it a tray of amber and goldfinches. She put it in the patio for the black bride to see. When she saw it she coveted it and enquired "Whose is this?" The servants answered "It belongs to the new servant. She asked for her to be brought before her. When she asked the servant to name her price, she replied "A night with your husband". The bride was taken aback but eventually gave in.

On that night, the black bride prepared the coffee with a sleeping potion in it and served it to her husband so that he would be incapable of doing anything. To test its effect, she burned his heel but he did not react. The woman was then allowed to come up to his apartment. Seeing him unconscious, she tried to shake him awake, explaining what happened. But he would not wake up.

A week or so later, the young woman took out the second daughter's gift, the almond, and broke it. Out of it came a priceless robe. She spread it out in the sun for the black bride to see. When she saw it she enquired "Whose is this ? The servants answered "it belongs to the new servant". She asked for her to be brought before her. When she asked the servant to name her price, she replied:" A night with your husband". The black bride was taken aback but remembering the beautiful robe, eventually gave in.

On that night again, the black bride prepared a coffee , put a sleeping potion and served it to her husband. Before allowing the servant into his apartment, she burnt his heel to test the effect of the potion. The king did not react. So she called the servant up. to his apartment The same thing happened again.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The king went to his vizier complaining about his sore feet and inexplicable exhaustion. The vizier enquired "What did you eat last night?" The king answered "Only the usual coffee and cake before going to bed". The vizier answered "Well, next time don't drink it, and pretend to fall asleep".

A week later she took out the hazelnut and broke it. Out of it came a priceless crown studded with emeralds and rubies. Again, she left it for the bride to find and the same thing happened. But this time she took a stick to strike him awake. That very night the king didn't drink his coffee so when the woman came he was wide awake but pretending to sleep. She cried to him and started to beat him. He stood up and enquired "Are you telling the truth? Was it really you?" She said "Indeed". She went to the bathroom and bathed and when she returned he gave her a priceless nightgown, and they passed the night in married bliss.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. When the black woman came to knock, he opened the door and asked his new bride to decide what her fate should be. She said "I want four she-camels, two hungry and two thirsty, to tear her apart". And so it was done.

The order was given to celebrate the wedding, seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. The king and queen lived happily for years until one day the queen yearned for her mother and sisters. She sent messengers to her sisters and they all gathered happily at their mother's house.

All the daughters lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

THE CRAZY ELDERLY WOMAN (R15)

Once upon a time there was an old woman who was married to a perfume merchant in Suq al-‘Attārīn. She had seven daughters. All of them got married and moved to their husbands' houses. After having a house full and bustling with children, the old woman found herself all alone and became demented. Her husband was a perfume maker and kept in his house provision of amber, jasmine, rose water and musk. One day, the old woman took out the whole provisions of amber to the courtyard and poured rose water over it which turned into a paste like Turkish delight. She moulded black dolls and gave them each a name and a task: "Mabrūka! your duty is to open the door to your master, Mas'ūda! your duty is to do the washing up, Zohra! your duty is to take charge of the kitchen...etc. Then she sat down clicking the beads of her rosary and chanting al-Latīf. The merchant came back at lunch time. He knocked on the door. The elderly woman told Mabrūka: "open the door for the master", but Mabrūka did not move. The old woman started to shout. The merchant forced the door open. And realising what had happened, he ordered her to leave the house. She said "never mind, I will take my bits and bobs and stay with my most affectionate daughter.

Her daughter gave her a warm welcome and expressed her delight to have her stay with her and give her some help. The daughter had many children and was up to her ears in washing. Thinking of a way of helping her, the old woman parceled up all the white sheets and the white linen and took them to the *Qarwi* dyer round the corner and asked him to dye them brown and black!

When her daughter realised what happened, she threw her out. She said, "Never mind, I will stay with my affectionate daughter". And she went to her second daughter.

God is omnipresent

There was a widower who had seven daughters. They had no-one in the world except Almighty God. One day a crier went round the village announcing the time had come for the pilgrimage. The father's heart yearned to make the pilgrimage. In those days, it took a whole year to accomplish. He called his eldest daughter and said "My heart has long yearned to visit Mecca the Holy. Can I rely on you to look after all your sisters during my absence, and not to open the door to any stranger?" 'Aisha the youngest said "You may go with an easy mind. I shall be the man of the house." The father prepared provisions for a year's journey and laid in for them everything they would need. As protection, he bought them a watchdog, and put seven locks on the door telling each girl not go beyond the threshold.

'Aisha fed the dog and pampered him. Azūzet es-Stūt, the old witch, noticed the helpless girls and decided to eat them. One day she came to the house and knocked at the door. One of the girls answered "Who is it?" "I'm your old aunt, come to visit you." "We haven't got an old aunt," she replied. "Yes, you do. It's your father's fault for not telling you, may God forgive him." The dog said "Woof, woof. My master put me in charge of his daughters. You won't get your hands on them. Over my dead body!" 'Aisha the youngest warned her sisters: "On no account open the door!" The ogress mumbled "Damn the dog!" and went away.

The following day she came back and knocked again. "I'm your dear aunt. Open the door. I'll keep you company and tell you stories." The dog replied "Woof, woof. My master put me in charge of his daughters. You won't get your hands on them. Over my dead body!" "Kill the dog!" the old witch urged the girls. 'Aisha warned them: "Don't listen to her; she's an ogress." The girls turned a deaf ear and killed the dog, and buried it in the entrance-hall. Soon the ogress came back. "Open the door, my dear ones!" The dog's bones replied "Woof, woof. My master put me in charge of his daughters. You won't get your hands on them. Over my dead body!" The girls took the skull and bones of the dog and burned them to ashes. 'Aisha gathered the ashes, buried them in a hole, and hid in the larder. The old witch was allowed into the house. The first night she won their confidence by telling them stories until they fell asleep.

The following day she ate them one by one. She addressed the first one, saying "Where shall I begin with you?" She answered "With my ears, which didn't listen to 'Aisha's warning." With that, the witch chewed her down to the bones. She then addressed the younger one: "Where shall I begin with you?" "With my teeth," she suggested "which bit my little sister 'Aisha." With that, she chewed her up. She then addressed the third one. "Where shall I begin with you?" "With my hand, which hit my little sister 'Aisha." She too was swiftly gnawed away. She then turned to the fourth one. "Where shall I begin with you?" "With my foot, which kicked my little sister 'Aisha." With that, the old witch ate her up. Her remaining two sisters met the same fate. The old witch left the house. 'Aisha came out of her hiding-place, gathered together her sisters' bones, crying and wailing. She then locked the door and settled down to wait for her father's return.

When the year was up, 'Aisha prepared cakes and sweets for the pilgrim's return. When he finally arrived she met him on the doorstep and wished him "May your pilgrimage be accepted and your sins absolved." After three days of seclusion, *as is customary on returning from the pilgrimage*, he asked "Where are your sisters?" She explained: "My dear father, they disobeyed your orders and opened the door to a cunning ogress, who ate them all. I warned them time and again, but they wouldn't listen. They tied me up and killed the dog. The ogress eventually ate them all." He replied "Bless you, who obeyed, and damn them who disobeyed!"

With that, we left them and we have never seen them again.

Once upon a time there was a Beldi married to four wives, one from Tunis, one from Gabes, one from Jerba and a black woman. . His Beldi wife, a Beldi from the bottom of the jar, was radiant, with good smooth light skin, good breeding and manners and *rīshat al-Baldiyya*. 'a touch of class'. His other wives were dark and green with tattoos, wearing their *melia*, 'regional bedouin dress'. . After a few years of marriage he grew tired of their jealousy and heavy expenses, so he decided to make things easier for himself by divorcing three wives ,and keeping one, but he didn't know which one to keep. So he consulted an elderly man and said :

"Uncle, I have four wives, and I've had enough of their continual quarreling and the expense of maintaining four households.

The old man answered: "Test them with four questions, and keep whoever gives the best answers.

The wives from Jerba and Gabes were bedouin peasants, wearing mellias and green with tattoos. The black wife was coal-black with thick lips and a wide, negroid nose . The beldi wife was fair, with a radiant face, of good breeding and with a touch of class.

He asked the Jerbi woman "What is your favorite dish?

She answered "Terfis and terfūs."

What is your ideal house?"

She answered "A house with a cellar."

"What is your favourite name?"

She answered "Yahya Bin Danfūs."

"How would you tell night from day?"

She answered "When the cattle sleep and the cockroaches come out."

He addressed the black woman "What is your favourite dish?"

She answered "'Assida with okra."

What is your favourite name?"

She answered "Mabrūka Ḥafnāwiyya."

"Your ideal dwelling?"

She answered '*bayt kummāniyya*, "The servants' quarters."

"How would you tell night from day?"

She answered "When the master asks for the chamber-pot."

Then he addressed the bedouin from Gabes.

"Your favourite dish?"

She said "Chicken couscous."

"Your favourite dwelling?"

"A mud hut without a door."

"Your favourite name?"

"Muhammed Ḥajjāj."

"How would you tell night from day?"

"When the cattle sleep and the ewes rise."

Finally he addressed the beldi wife. "What is your favourite dish?"

She answered "Ftât 'al-Mri."

"Your favourite dwelling?"

She answered "A two-storey house with a courtyard"

" Y o u r f a v o r i t e n a m e ? "

She answered "Muhammed and 'Ali."

"How would you recognise night from day?"

She answered "When the muezzin calls to prayer: In the Prophet's holy dwelling-place,
Peace be Upon Him."

He said to himself : I'll keep the beldi and divorce the others.

And they lived happily ever after.

There was a Beldi who had an orchard in Jebel Wuslât, and he hired a sharecropper to work it. In those days, owners did not work their own land, but had sharecroppers and factors to do it. The sharecroppers would take one fifth of the crop and the factors would supervise the workers and labourers. The sharecropper would represent the owner of the land in all deals in the market. One day a sharecropper came to Tunis and headed for the owner's house, as usual. *In those times it was usual for the sharecropper to stay with the owner when he came to town on business.* He arrived late, knocked on the door and was let in. They gave him a meal. *In those days the food was kept fresh outside under an upturned copper basin for the barrow boys who brought produce regularly from the orchard, because there were no vans at the time.* He ate his fill, had a glass of tea, and stayed up until four or five in the morning when he left for the market. He bought and sold, and came back to share the profits with the owner; one fifth for himself and four fifths for the owner. The sharecropper stayed with the owner three days and three nights. The owner gave him hospitality and entertained him. He took him to the *Café Chantant* 'cabaret café', to the cinema, the *Karakūz* 'Punch and Judy show', and so on. The man was delighted. Then he took him to the *suq* to help him buy clothes. He bought an overall for himself, and scarves, lengths of colourful *mellia* cloth, and embroidered slippers for the women. Then he went to *Sūq al-'Attarīn* 'Perfumers' Suk' and bought amber and musk and kohl. He filled a bag and got on his donkey and rode off. Before he left the owner said to him "Mabrūk" or "Meftāḥ, *for those were common names of the peasants*, next time you come, bring us fresh eggs and fresh chicken." The sharecropper answered "Certainly." The owner went on "And bring us fresh ghee and butter." "Of course" the sharecropper answered. "Don't forget the *tabbūna* bread (baked in a clay oven)." The sharecropper answered "I won't." The owner went on and on... The sharecropper agreed with every request, and set off.

Three days later, he reached Jebel Wuslât. He got off his donkey and shouted "You, the Beldi, you're always asking me for this and that. To hell with all that! You can't reach me here! F*** off!"

SA'DIYYA'S REPERTOIRE

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen,
while the enemy's house is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness;
may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back
with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it
walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of
faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there was a silk merchant who was married to his cousin and they doted on each other. One day, he came and said he wanted to pay a visit to Sīdi Belḥassen, the local saint, on the customary visiting day. She said "Yes, of course." So the merchant went to pay his usual visit to the local saint. There he met one of his friends, who asked him a favour. "I have many jars of oil, which I would like you to look after for me. Then I will collect them later. The merchant answered "Willingly!"
In olden times, houses had huge store-rooms.

The merchant's friend brought forty jars and lined them up in the store-room. Now, they had a maid who became suspicious at the sight of the forty jars. "I must uncover the mystery" she thought. On the same evening, the family stayed up late but there was a power cut. The maid suggested they should use some of the oil to make lamps. When she lifted the lid of the first jar she discovered a red *shashiyya* (man's skullcap), and realised there was a thief inside every jar. She emptied one of their own oil jars into a large cauldron and brought it to the boil. Then she uncovered every jar and poured some boiling oil into each one. All forty men died instantly. Now, they were to have risen from the jars at their master's signal with a couple of pebbles, and swarm through the house, stealing everything. So when he threw the first pebble, no-one responded. When the second and third pebbles still brought no answer, their master understood what must have happened. The maid went to report to her mistress what

she had done. The following day, the master of the thieves came to his friend's house to claim his jars as if nothing had happened. He carried away forty jars containing forty corpses. This fuelled his anger and he swore to take his revenge.

The merchant, appalled at what had happened, said to his wife: "We're not safe any more in this town. We have to move. We'll sell the house and move away." A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. He put an advertisement in the paper which came to the notice of the master of the thieves, who decided to keep a watch on them. The merchant sold the house and bought two she-camels, and made ready to depart. The following day they gathered together provisions and all their heart's desires and set off early, the merchant leading and his wife behind. They travelled and travelled, emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear Almighty God. The master of the thieves followed them surreptitiously on a camel. The merchant's camel sped on ahead, but his wife's was slower, and the master of the thieves caught up with her, and grasped her camel's tail to hold it back. Her husband was unaware of this and continued on his way, calling out from time to time without turning round "Are you still there? Come on!"

By now, the merchant's wife had fallen far behind. The master of the thieves caught hold of her and tied her to a tree. "You will die there. You have murdered my men. Then he went to collect some wood to burn her. In the meantime, a salt-peddler passed by. She cried out to him "Save me, please save me! My enemy is going to kill me! Your good turn will be rewarded." The old man untied her and put her in one of his donkey's panniers with a cover over her. When the master of the thieves came back, there was no trace of her. He climbed on his camel and rode away. A few miles further on he met the salt-peddler and asked him "Old man, have you seen a woman?" Pretending he was deaf, he answered "Eh? What?" The man gave up.

The salt-peddler arrived home and unloaded his panniers. To calm his wife's surprise at the sight of the woman, he recounted what had happened. She took pity on her and decided to adopt her as her own daughter. The younger woman lived with them, helping to cook and clean and run the house. Their house was close to that of the Sultan. One day, the Sultan's son's dove escaped, and he followed it from roof to roof until he came to the old peddler's house. He saw the young woman of exceptional beauty, praise to God who created her with such a beauty, hanging out the washing on the terrace. He stood spellbound. "Where has she come from? To my knowledge, the old woman has no daughter."

The old woman was in the habit of paying courtesy calls to the palace, so on the next occasion she visited, the prince told her "I want your daughter." The old woman answered "Which daughter? I have no daughter." The merchant's young wife had asked her to keep her existence secret.

After a while the merchant realised that his wife had disappeared. He looked for her, then gave up *as men and time are not to be trusted!*

The prince warned: "Either you tell me the truth or your head will roll." The old woman recounted to him the young woman's story. The prince said "Ask her if she will marry me." The old woman answered "I will tell her." When she came back to the house, she informed the young woman of the prince's intention. She answered "I won't hear of it as long as my enemy is still alive." Astonished, the old woman replied "How could you turn down the prince?" She answered "Go and tell him my answer." So the old woman went back to the palace and recounted what had happened between her and her adopted daughter. "I will provide three lions on the right and three on the left, and soldiers to protect her." The old woman reported back to the girl, who eventually agreed to marry the prince, on condition that she wore a black dress and that there would be no celebration.

Her enemy, the master of the thieves, searched everywhere for her to no avail, but he promised himself that she would not get away from him.

The prince and the girl were married. As promised, three lions were placed on her left and three on her right, with soldiers to protect her. Time passed, and they lived happily.

The master of the thieves was now in the same town. News reached him that Miss So-and-So had married the Sultan *as news travels like wildfire in a small town*. So he prepared to carry out his plan of revenge. It was summer-time, so he made up a big pitcher of lemon squash and began to distribute it to the soldiers with little cakes. He did this over several days until he gained their trust and gratitude. One day, he enquired "Why are there so many of you on guard duty? What are the lions for?" They answered "Our master the prince is protecting his young bride from an enemy she fears." He asked nonchalantly "An enemy? By the way, where are her apartments?" They replied "Over there", pointing to a building.

On the following afternoon, the man came back with the same pitcher of lemon squash and cakes. This time he included a sleeping potion. He distributed the lemon squash and the cakes as usual to the soldiers. All of them drank and passed out. Then he turned his attention to the lions and threw them poisoned legs of meat. They too passed out. He sneaked up to the roof of the girl's apartment and began to make a hole. Then he dropped down inside.

The girl was taking a nap. He shook her awake and ordered her to accompany him. She protested "How can I come with you, dressed in my petticoat? Let me dress." She went to the room next door where her husband was sleeping. She tried to wake him but couldn't. In her panic she didn't know what to do. Suddenly the wall split apart and a bedouin woman appeared, saying "How can I help you?" The girl answered "My enemy has caught up with me. The bedouin answered "I will wake your husband, but promise me that if you bear a girl you will give her to me. If you bear a boy you may keep him." The girl gave her promise, so her husband was woken up, together with the soldiers and the lions. Soon the man was torn to pieces.

The town was all lit up at the news and the prince's wedding was celebrated belatedly. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. God willed it and his young bride became pregnant. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin tautening on bone, and a baby girl was born as a beautiful as the moon. Praise God the creator for creating her with such a beauty. The baby crawled, tottered, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows up in a year or two, but in just a couple of words in a tale. Little Lūsha turned five and was sent to school. Her mother forgot all about her promise to the bedouin. Every day after school she was met by the old bedouin woman who would kiss her and tell her to remind her mother of her promise. The girl was too young to remember. One day the bedouin pinched her hard on the arm, leaving a mark so that she would remember.

The girl was now fourteen. Her mother was bathing her when she found the mark on her arm. She enquired "Who hurt my little darling?" The girl said "Oh, Mama, that reminds me. There is a woman who always kisses me when I come out of school and asks me to remind you of your promise." The mother was devastated at this and kept silent. That night, she cried her eyes out. The following day, after she had got her daughter ready for school, she told her: "When this bedouin approaches you again, tell her "I'm yours."

The bedouin came as usual to meet Lūlsha, who repeated her mother's words to the woman. "Close your eyes", the bedouin ordered. Lūlsha closed them. When she opened them again, she found herself in a strange place. She cried and shouted for her mother. The bedouin soothed her with gold, diamonds and pearls. Lūlsha calmed down and gradually got used to the place.

One day she opened seven rooms for her; one full of diamonds, one full of pearls, one full of gold, and so on until she got to the seventh, which she forbade her to open.

Lūlsha's presence filled the bedouin's life with joy. She entertained her with stories and riddles. One day the woman asked her to massage her scalp. As she was doing so, she found a twist of paper in her hair. "What's this?" she enquired. The old woman explained "It's called Burn-me-with-Fire. Put it back." Lūlsha pretended to do so but hid it in her bodice. Then she found another twist of paper. "What is this called?" she enquired. "Thorns-and-Thistles. Put it back." Then she found another one. "What's this called?" she asked. "Throw-me behind-the-Seven-Seas. Did you put them all back?" Lūlsha said "Yes, of course", but she was lying.

One day the bedouin woman informed her that she was going on a trip, warned her not to open the forbidden room, and left. Lūlsha thought to herself "I wonder why she doesn't want me to open this room. She's given me everything: rubies, pearls, diamonds. What is in this room? I must unravel the mystery." She went straight to the room and opened it. It was a long room. There was a flash of light which she followed. At the end of the room she discovered a fine handsome young man lying on the floor with a heavy stone on his chest. She approached him. "Hello?" As soon as she said this, he breathed his last. In panic Lūlsha rushed from the room and closed it. As soon as she closed the room, she saw a cloud of smoke, the wind rose and the sky grew dark. Lūlsha remembered the twist of paper. She threw the Thorn-and-Thistle one. "You have betrayed me", the bedouin cried. "Take this", giving her a lock of her hair, "and roll it into a cigarette and light it if you are in danger." Lūlsha took it, and cast the Throw-me-behind-the-Seven-Seas paper. The bedouin was soon out of sight.

Lūlsha went into the different rooms collecting gold, diamonds and pearls, put on her wrap and went out. She walked and walked, emptying one land and filling another, yet no land can be filled except by our dear Lord. She grew tired and sleepy, she found a stone and sat down to rest. Worn out by exertion she sank into death slumber like and it was not until the following morning when the sun rose that she came to her senses. She woke up to the sound of a shepherd's call. She went to him and said "Would you

like to exchange my clothes for yours?" "Are you mad?" he asked. "I'm serious," she replied. The shepherd could not but be tempted. He took off his outer clothes and gave them to her. She gave him hers in return and changed into his, rolling up her long hair under a turban, and went back to her seat.

As she sat there, the king's messenger passed by and dropped a letter he was carrying into a puddle. He started to cry, fearing the king's wrath, thinking aloud "My head will roll for this!" She approached him saying "Don't you worry, I will write you another one." Could you really?" he asked. "Indeed I could." *Remember she was speaking as a man, disguised in the shepherd's clothes.*

He went and brought her a sheet of paper and an envelope. She copied the letter in her own hand. The messenger was delighted and took it to the king. When the king opened it he was amazed at the elegance of the handwriting. He turned to his vizier saying "This letter is not like others. I must find out about it. Call the messenger back." The messenger was brought before the king. "Tell me the story behind this letter." The messenger answered "My Lord, I must confess that I dropped the letter in a puddle and a shepherd offered to copy it for me." The king commanded the shepherd to be brought to him immediately.

She was still resting when the king's guard came to fetch her. They took her to the baths, but fearing she would be found out, she insisted on being left alone to bathe. After bathing, she was dressed in a fine robe befitting a royal scribe. The king took to him/her at once, and didn't want to be parted from him, even for an instant. The king's wife, as soon as she set eyes on him, felt a burning desire for him. She sent him her maid, saying "Could you return the passion of one who burns for you?" He answered "I would rather be damned than betray my Lord's trust." The king's wife was enraged by this answer. "How dare he turn down someone of my rank? I know what I can do. I shall take my revenge." She confided in the vizier that the new scribe had made improper suggestions to her. The vizier was jealous of the scribe's favoured position, so he told the king one day "I don't trust the scribe; he has a shifty look. In fact, I think he's a woman." The king answered "Really?" The vizier continued "I have long sensed it; only God knows. Let's scatter jasmine flowers on his bed." *Jasmine will wither in the presence of a woman, but not of a man.*

The vizier crept into the scribe's room one afternoon and scattered jasmine flowers on his bed. When the scribe returned to sleep in the evening, she found the flowers and realised the intention behind it. So she gathered up the blooms and left them on the

window-sill. When she awoke in the morning, she scattered the still-fresh flowers back on the bed, and went off to her duties.

The vizier wasted no time and rushed into the scribe's room to see the result of his scheme. To his surprise, the jasmine flowers were all fresh. He reported it to the king, who said to him "I told you he's a man."

After a while, the king's wife sent her maid again to the scribe saying "Would you return the passion of one who burns for you?" Again he answered "I don't want your passion; I won't risk my life for it. I would rather be damned than betray my Lord's trust." This made the king's wife even angrier. She raged "How dare he disobey me? I shall take my revenge." So she called the vizier and confided that the scribe was still foisting his attentions on her.

The vizier approached the king, saying that he was still convinced the scribe was a woman. "I shall spread thorns and thistles in his bed. A man wouldn't pay any attention, but a woman will wake the next day tired and with pains in her back and sides. *Women are always more delicate than men.* The king agreed to the scheme.

The vizier crept into the scribe's room and spread thorns and thistles in his bed. When she came in and went to bed, she sensed something rough, so she decided to sleep on the sofa. The next day, she resumed her duties as usual with no word of complaint about a sleepless night. The king and the vizier gave up.

Two years passed. One day, the king's wife, still harbouring a passion for the scribe, contrived a plan. She instructed her servants that when they heard her cry out, they were to break into the apartments. She crept into the scribe's apartment, saying "I have come to you in person this time. Would you return my passion?" He answered "I would rather be damned than betray my Lord's trust." Outraged, the king's wife started to cry for help. All the servants came running and broke in through the window. The news reached the king, who rushed to the scene. "Your beloved scribe" she said "made advances to me." The king was enraged and ordered him to be beheaded. "How dare he have designs on my own wife? He shall die."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Pophet will be blessed. The vizier was entrusted with carrying out the sentence. Before doing so, he asked the scribe if he had any final request. The scribe said he wanted to smoke a last cigarette. His wish was granted. The scribe rolled a cigarette around that special lock of hair, lit it and inhaled

deeply. The second time he inhaled, the sky turned dark, a strong wind arose and the bedouin made her appearance in the air. The crowd gaped in astonishment. The bedouin descended and pulled off the scribe's turban, allowing her beautiful long hair to fall loose to her feet. She snatched her up, saying "You stupid donkey! My daughter has been with you for two years and you didn't know if she was man or woman!" With that, she rose into the sky and flew off with her. The king shouted "Bring her back to me! Bring her back, bring her back!" But the women were soon out of sight.

By seeking constantly throughout the two years, the bedouin had found a suitable husband for Lülsha, and the wedding was celebrated at once. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except at the sultan's house. Lülsha was eventually reunited with her natural mother, and

they all lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!". She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there lived in Tunis a childless king who had always yearned for a child to fill his house with joy. He prayed day and night to God to grant him a child. One night an angel came to him in a dream, asking him "Do you want a daughter with a misfortune but who survives, or a son with a misfortune who dies?" He turned on his side and exclaimed "God forbid!" But the angel appeared again, explaining "I am a messenger sent from God to fulfil your wishes." His wife the Queen noticed his agitation and enquired: 'What's wrong with our lord, his sleep is disturbed and his bed is upset?' He recounted what he had seen and she advised him "A daughter. We are rich and powerful and can overcome any misfortune." So when the angel returned, the King asked him for a daughter. The angel answered "When you rise in the morning, go to the water-butt facing Mecca and you will find a date. Give half to your wife and eat the rest yourself; burn the stone as incense and keep it a secret."

He did so, and his wife became pregnant. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin tautening on bone. A seamstress was summoned and the baby's layette was prepared. One evening the queen gave birth to a baby girl as beautiful as the moon. Praise the creator who created her with such a beauty. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. Out of concern for her

seclusion, the king had a glass palace built for her, suspended between earth and sky, to prevent any misfortune befalling her, but" whatever is written shall be".

Then the baby was taken to the palace with her maid. Thus the girl grew up knowing nothing and no-one but her mother and father and the maid. One day the servant fell ill, and the princess Rdāh had to eat her meat off the bone, which the servant had always removed for her. Not knowing what it was, she tapped it on the floor, which broke open, being glass. For the first time ever she saw the outside world through the hole and people going to and fro. "So there are other people besides my parents!" she exclaimed. As she marveled at the sight, she heard a bedouin woman shouting. The princess enquired what was wrong. The woman answered "God protect us! Are you human or spirit?"

"A human" the princess answered. "May God protect your beauty! Will you allow me to come and visit you?" The request was granted and she came up into the glass palace. When she saw the princess' long flowing hair, she praised Allāh and said: "Glory to Allāh the exalted creator! What beautiful hair you have! The only thing missing is musk oil to perfume it." "Where can one get it?" the princess asked. "Your father is the King and could get you anything." With that, the woman left.

The following week, Rdāh's face turned as pale as straw and she slept in a sick bed. Her father was summoned urgently to visit her. When he came and enquired about the cause of her illness, she answered petulantly "I want some musk oil". No sooner had she uttered this than the king slapped her on the face angrily, saying "Who put that idea into your head?" She didn't answer, fearing to tell him about the woman coming to visit her. Her father came back to the palace, angry and full of foreboding. The queen met him, inquiring about her daughter's health. He answered "There is nothing wrong with her health, but I fear this is the beginning of her misfortune". "Tell me what has happened". He answered "Your daughter is now asking for musk oil to be brought to her. You know how its perfume can be smelt for miles around and it is bound to attract attention to her". "Have you gone mad?" the queen exclaimed. "How could she know about it?" asked the king. The queen answered "Our daughter is well-read. She must have read about it in her books. You shouldn't have hit her. Get it for her and apologise". So the king sent his vizier to get it and took it with him when he next went to visit her, warning her to use it sparingly.

Ḥmid al-Hilālī, a member of the Beni Hilāl tribe, had a cousin of exceptional beauty, but he couldn't take her as his bride because she was his foster-sister. He always marveled at her beauty and asked "How on earth could I ever find anyone else as

beautiful as you?" He was already married to a girl from the same tribe. One day, his cousin told him of the rumours about a woman of exceptional beauty living in Tunis. He said "I will find her".

He was a handsome Bedouin Arab. He put on his *barnūs* and headcloth, picked up his rifle and set off. He travelled and travelled and travelled emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until he came to a group of Bedouin singers, 'Ghanāya'. A woman among them asked "Have you come for us, O handsome young man, or are you visiting other lands?" "I have neither come for you nor am I visiting other lands. Tell me about Rdāḥ, who has driven suitors mad with her beauty". She answered "An evil fate must have driven you all the way. If you seek Paradise it is close at hand; but Hell lies at the end of the path you have chosen". He answered "Had I wanted wheat I would have eaten it at home". He turned his horse and rode off. He went on and on, emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by almighty God, until he came to another gathering of Bedouin singers, 'Ṭabbāla'. The dancer of the group, seeing his beauty, enquired "O handsome young knight, have you come for us, or are you heading for other lands?" He answered "I have neither come for you nor am I heading for other lands. Tell me about Rdāḥ, who has driven me mad". She said with a wink "Paradise is close at hand; but Hell lies at the end of your path." He said "Had I wanted wheat I would have eaten it at home". And he rode off.

As he drew closer to Tunis, the perfume of musk oil now wafted stronger and stronger and Ḥmid's heart throbbed more wildly. He arrived at Bāb Bḥar, in the centre of the city. He approached a Jewish shoemaker and enquired "What is this perfume?" The Jew answered:

"It is the perfume of Rdāḥ, Mother of Beauty.

Her breasts are like two golden apples,

Her locks, dressed in sixty-six plaits,

Are perfumed with musk oil.

Her lips are coral-red and her teeth white as pearls.

Her cheeks are like pomegranates.

She is not as tall as a palm tree nor too short to be seen.

Her skin is neither as white as milk nor brown as a berry."

On hearing her description Ḥmid's heart pounded with love and tenderness. He asked where he could find her. The Jew answered "Just there," pointing to the glass palace. Ḥmid turned his horse and headed for the palace.

Rdāḥ walked about her apartment, dressed in a fine transparent silk petticoat, letting down her long hair loose and perfumed with musk oil. That day, she had decided to bathe, so she sent Dāda to fetch some water and heat it for her. When Dāda reached the spring outside the palace she was amazed to find a handsome young man mounted on a horse. She stood marvelling at his beauty and forgot about the water. When she came to her senses, she hastened to draw the water and return to the palace. Rdāḥ scolded her, asking "What kept you?" Dāda replied "A handsome young knight, mounted on a fine horse, who fixed me with piercing eyes until I could bear his gaze no longer." Rdāḥ told her "Go and ask him where he comes from." So Dāda went and asked him "Who are you and where do you come from?" He replied "Give my greetings to your mistress and tell her I am Ḥmid al-Hilālī of the Beni Hilāl tribe, whose prowess in battle is legendary." Dāda went back and reported what she had heard. Rdāḥ covered herself in her wrap and went down to look. Their eyes met. He told her "I was destined to come all this way to woo you, despite warnings. My heart will always beat for you, even if I should repent." She replied "Your folly is boundless. How dare you ask for a treasure you can never aspire to, a mighty tree you could never climb." On hearing this, he turned his horse to leave. She added "Are you angry or running away? Anger is unworthy of noble people." He replied "I am neither angry nor running away, and indeed, anger is unworthy of noble people. It's of no consequence; only Destiny can decide. If Destiny delivers you into my hands, even if you resist, you are bound to give in."

She invited him to follow her, and they spent three days and nights together... On the third day she gave him her necklace as a token of her troth and sent him to see her father.

Ḥmid took the necklace and travelled with it to his own land. He went straight to see his cousin and related to her what had happened. She asked him "Could you describe her to me?" He repeated the Jew's description. She told him "Bring her to me so I can rejoice at your marriage." He gave her the necklace and told her "I have to go to let's say France or America to order the furniture. Give this to 'Ammār and Khalīfa and send them to ask the king for her hand on my behalf."

Ḥmid went back to see his wife, who had heard of his plans, and asked her to prepare some *mesfuf* quickly before he set off. She got it ready and served it to him. Usually she prepared it with butter, sugar, nuts and milk, but this time she served it plain and he remarked on it. Nothing is better than sweet mesfuf to give strength to

face the day, but yours today is bitter." She replied "No-one can either bear or want a cup of bitterness. You are taking another woman in my place; we must go our separate ways."

His cousin took charge of the painting and decoration of the house in readiness for the wedding. She summoned 'Ammār and Khalifa and gave them the necklace and asked them to go and visit the king in person. They put on their best clothes and set off. They arrived in the city and headed for the palace, asking for an audience. "Have you come to make a complaint?" They replied "Certainly not. We have come on a private matter." So the king was informed that two Bedouin peasants wanted to see him. He told the footman to show them in after he had finished with the legal affairs of the kingdom. As soon as they were shown in, 'Ammār and Khalifa greeted the king and threw the necklace before him. The king was taken aback. *Tradition had it that whenever a daughter gave away her necklace, it meant that she accepted the suitor.* Beside himself with rage, the king summoned the vizier and told him to throw Rdāḥ out in rags, like a dog.

Now Dāda came to see her mistress, scolding her for her ingratitude, saying "My lord has spoilt and pampered you in a glass palace, away from prying eyes, and you pay him back by choosing an uncouth Bedouin peasant." When Rdāḥ saw the two men, she understood. She found herself outside, dispossessed and stripped of all her belongings.

Rdāḥ, being the king's daughter, had always lived a sheltered and leisurely life. The two men took her and on the way tried to molest her. She resisted, but they took turns in abusing her. She was of the city and not used to the scorching sun. She got sunstroke, and by the time they reached the village she was almost dying. *Where would she escape from her father's wrath.* His cousin immediately took care of her and nursed her. Ḥmid al-Hilālī sent a messenger to announce his return. By now Rdāḥ was dying. She called Ḥmid's cousin and told her "I have a secret; I want to confide it to you. The cousin said "Tell me; I promise to keep it forever." She said to her "A bird of the land can not live over the sea, and silk and cotton are for the nobility and merchants. I am soft and he is rough. We are poles apart. That is my real grief. I fell sick from no illness and he is finished without being killed." And she sighed her last.

Ḥmid's cousin grieved and wailed over her death. She buried her in an inner room and decided to find him a new bride. She had a beautiful slave-girl named Nūr al-

Sabāḥ. She got her ready for the wedding and carried on with the preparations for the planned celebration.

Rumours of Rdāḥ's death reached Ḥmid, so he looked from afar through his binoculars to see if there were any signs of mourning in the village. But he was glad to see that the place was all decorated and lit up. He set off and arrived back in the village. He went straight to his cousin and asked if Rdāḥ was there. She answered "Indeed, she is to be your bride, just as you wanted." So she showed him to the bridal chamber but when he lifted Nūr as-Sabāḥ's veil he turned to his cousin. "This isn't Rdāḥ! Tell me where she is!" She replied "I can't lie to you any more. Rdāḥ died, and I had her buried in there." Ḥmid went to see the tomb, crying "He who dies with the sun will be resurrected by the rain. I want no-one but my beautiful Rdāḥ. If I can't have her back I will die." And he fell down dead. *So Destiny united them and destiny separated them.* So his cousin, weeping, opened Rdāḥ's tomb and laid them to rest together.

There we left them, and they were never seen again.

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upn a time

Once upon a time, there was a childless king who had always yearned for a child. He prayed to God night and day to grant him a child who would complete his happiness. One night an angel appeared in a dream and asked him "Do you want a boy with a misfortune but who lives, or a daughter with a misfortune who dies?" He turned away and said "God forbid!" The angel appeared again. Seeing his agitation, his wife enquired what was wrong, and he told her of his vision. She said "Ask for a boy. We have power and money and can overcome any misfortune." So when the angel appeared again, the king asked for a boy. The angel said "Go to the water-butt facing Mecca. You will find a date; eat half of it and give the other half to your wife."

God willed it so, and she became pregnant Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin taughtening on bone. The queen went into labour and gave birth to a bouncing healthy boy as beautiful as the moon. The news was received with great rejoicing and celebration. The boy crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child would grow in a year or two but just in a couple of words in a tale He was spoilt and pampered. A wet-nurse was summoned to look after the child, then a nanny, then a tutor. The prince was instructed in all the arts, sciences and in chivalry, as befitted his rank.

Now the prince had grown into a handsome young man, but he began to display a cruel streak and his arrogance, given full rein, turned to despotism. No woman was safe from his attentions; wives, young girls and even old maids were dishonoured, to the indignation of husbands, fathers and brothers. People complained to the king, but he wouldn't hear a word against his beloved only son.

Outraged, and seeing no other solution, the people turned to an old witch to put an end to his evil excesses. Two men were chosen to go and seek her help. They told her "The prince has abused our wives, sisters and mothers, and we don't know how to put a stop to it." She replied "Is that all? I can rid you of him, and erase every trace of his existence from the country." They came to an agreement about her fee, and left.

The old witch went back to her room and dressed herself in a green robe. She took a green stick and went out. She came to a path he habitually took and sat down with her legs stretched out in front of her, and waited. Soon the prince passed by on his horse at a gallop, with his vizier. Ignoring her presence, he made his horse jump over her, catching her foot as he did so. She cried out "Ouch! My foot!" and started wailing. The vizier came back and enquired "What has happened? What are you wailing about?" She replied "Your honoured master's horse is the cause. He trampled me and ignored me, and left my toes bleeding. I will never get over it. He is as haughty as if he had conquered al-Ḥājja Mkāda." The vizier continued on his way. When he caught up with the prince, the latter asked "What kept you, father's vizier?" He replied "What kept me was that wailing old woman who told me "he trampled me and ignored me, and left my toe bleeding. I will never get over it. He is as haughty as if he conquered al-Ḥājja Mkāda..... He asked "What did you tell her?" The vizier replied "I told her to wait, and we'd be back for her." The prince said "Thank you, vizier, for your initiative." With that, he turned his horse and headed back. But when he came to where the woman had been, she was nowhere to be seen. He hunted around, but to no avail.

So he went back to the palace, his face as pale as straw and he slept in sick bed. All the physicians and magicians of the kingdom were summoned, but each and every one said that he was suffering neither from fever nor sweating, but mere melancholy. The king was perturbed, fearing that his only son might die. He tried everything to make him laugh; acrobats, jugglers, conjurors, but without success. All the old story-tellers in the kingdom, men and women, were called to entertain him but the old witch refused, saying "If he wants me, let him come to me. After all, young people should respect their elders."

On hearing this, the prince pulled himself together and went to see her. She asked him "So now you are infatuated with the black-eyed beauty you have heard about? I will direct you how to find her, but promise me that you will go without a companion. Promise me that you will go unarmed."

As soon as he heard this, the prince rushed back to the palace, hurriedly gathered together provisions and all his heart's desires, and informed the king and queen he was leaving. The king declared mourning throughout the kingdom; no-one was to celebrate a wedding, or a circumcision, no rejoicing whatsoever was to take place.

Ḥmid al-Mitjawal walked and walked, and walked, emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except with our dear almighty God. The prince beheaded anyone he met who was unable to tell him of her whereabouts. Eventually he grew tired of beheading people and decided to do otherwise. He approached a shoemaker and sat chatting with him for a while. He left him a purse of gold and disappeared. The shoemaker was overjoyed at such a windfall. The next day, the prince came back to see the man and left another purse of gold. On reporting this unexpected godsend to his wife, she suggested he should ask the man to come and dine with them.

So, on the next occasion the shoemaker saw the prince, he invited him to dine. When he came to the house, the shoemaker's wife asked him "I understand you are looking for Al-Ḥājja Mkāda?" He replied "Indeed I am." She reproached him, saying "What has driven you to this? Your very life is at risk." The prince answered "My life is in God's hands. I don't need your advice." She continued "In this country, the hangman's noose awaits anyone who ventures to talk about her or say where she is. But I will direct you. My husband will be carrying an oil-can. Follow him, and when he collapses, do not stop to help him but continue your way until you come to the palace where she lives." The next morning, the prince did as he was told. When he came to the palace, he found a horse-trough and a bench. He tied up his horse and lay down to rest on the bench.

Al-Ḥājja Mkāda was wandering about in her palace when Dāda came to inform her that Ḥmid Al-Mitjawal was outside. The princess replied with a smile "He is destined to be my husband. Go to the store-room and make some honey-dough." Dāda hurriedly made the cakes and came back with them to her mistress, who told her "Go and waken this sleeping beauty. Give him these honey cakes and tell him 'Eat these, and leave.

This is not a place for a playboy like you." Dāda went down and wakened Ḥmid al-Mitjawal, reporting to him what her mistress had said. He said "Give my greetings to your mistress and tell her I don't want your pastries; it's a different sort of honey-cake I want ..." Dāda went back to her mistress and told her what he had said. The princess took a quick bath, put on a silk petticoat. As she walked about her apartment, the perfume of musk wafted all over the place. She sent Dāda downstairs to invite the man to join her in sleeping chamber. He greeted her, saying:

"You who have broken every young man's heart ...

News of your beauty reached me one day

And at once I set off without delay.

For two years I wandered around and around,

But no-one would tell me where you could be found."

She replied:

"I am Al-Hājja, daughter of 'issa,

My beauty is flawless and my fame spread afar.

Had I not feared disgrace, the mere sight of my face

Would distract the poor pilgrims away from God's grace."

They spent three days and nights in illicit bliss, then she gave him her necklace as a token of her troth, and he rode away. The following day the prince sought an audience with the king. In private, he gave him the necklace and told him he was Ḥmid Al-Mitjawal, son of his highness the king of Tunis. He gave him a warm welcome and immediately gave orders to celebrate the wedding, seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's palace.

The prince's father was still in mourning for his absence, so a messenger was sent to him to say that his son was safe and sound. Three days after the marriage was celebrated, the prince and his new bride took leave of the king and travelled back to the prince's land. A second celebration of the wedding took place, seven days and seven nights where no food was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. The whole kingdom was painted and decorated and lit up in their honour.

And they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

THE BIRTH MARK (S4)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with cotton, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!".

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there was a perfume merchant who was married to his cousin. She was loyal, faithful and dearer than life to him.

One day, as he was working in his shop, a man passed by selling a bird which could sing and tell stories. He said to himself "Why not buy it for my wife to keep her company?" He bought it, and bought for it a golden cage and two bowls, one gold and one silver, and took it home to his sister. He filled one bowl with rose-water and the other with birdseed. Of course, the bird could talk. Each and every day his wife would get up in the morning, see to her household chores and then sit and listen to the bird, entertaining her with stories. She grew very fond of the bird.

One day, he went on a business trip to Mahdiyya with a group of fellow-merchants. The merchants would buy and sell during the day and gather at night to play cards. On evening the topic of women's fickleness was raised. One of them said "No-one could even dream of seeing my wife's fingernail." Another added "It would be easier to reach heaven than to catch a glimpse of my sister." The merchant intervened, saying "No matter what you say, there will never be a woman as virtuous as my wife. She has never stepped across the threshold and no man has ever seen her toe." One of them answered "Who do you take her for! Let us bet on it. The merchant said "Done! Let us

play a game of cards." They played, and the other man won. He said to him "Does she have any distinguishing mark on her body?" The merchant answered "Yes, she has." The other merchant asked "What if I discovered it?" The merchant answered "Do as you please."

The man went back to Tunis and sought out an old witch, told her the story and asked her to help him reach the woman, otherwise he would lose all his fortune and become a slave to the brother. They came to an agreement, and he directed her to the woman's house.

The old witch dressed herself in a green robe, covered her head with a green shawl and painted her stick green and went to see the woman. She knocked on the door and posed as her aunt, but the woman was surprised to hear that she had an aunt. The old witch explained: "Your father, God rest his soul, cut me off from my sister, so we weren't able to see each other. Now he is in God's care, and I have forgiven him." She started to cry and sob. The woman was taken in by her sweet words and let her in. She entertained her to tea, and then she left. The old witch would come and visit her every day. One day, she came and invited her to attend her supposed daughter's *henna* ceremony, which would be incomplete without her presence, now that they had been re-united, thank God. The woman answered "You know my husband is away and I cannot go out in his absence." The witch replied "How can you disappoint your cousin like that? Don't you want her to be happy?" She eventually talked her into it. The woman put on her finery, took out her silk and silver veil and was about to go out when the bird intervened: "Mistress, put your silken veil away in the chest and your gold in your jewel-box, and let me tell you the story of the muezzin." The old witch said "Is this the time for telling stories? Damn the bird!" The woman answered "I must listen to my bird's story." The old witch left in a rage. The bird started his story:

Once upon a time there was a pious muezzin who used to make a living calling people to pray. One day as he was calling people for the morning prayer, a dove flew down and settled on his shoulder. He stroked her gently, but soon the dove picked him up in her beak and flew off to a distant land. On arrival, the dove changed into a beautiful maiden as beautiful as the moon, praise the creator who created her with such a beauty. She soon advised him that she had made him the king of that land in place of her recently deceased husband. The muezzin thanked Allah the merciful for his *qasm*, 'alloted share', and lived happily for years treated with the love and respect due to a king. One day the queen discovered that he was unfaithful to her anymore. When she confronted him with it, he said: "You are getting too old for me!" Grieved and hurt in

her pride, she changed him back into a muezzin and blew him off to his original place, and fate turned against him. When he realized his change of fortune, he regretted it, and stood days on end waiting for the dove to come back." The bird continued "Mistress, if you leave your house you will regret it too." She she folded her veil, placed it in the chest and declined the invitation.

The old witch left in a rage. She went to see the man who was waiting to carry the woman off on his horse, and related what had happened, saying "It's an impossible task. Did her husband mention anything distinctive about her?" He answered "Yes, she has a birthmark." She replied "Don't you worry. I will tell you what it is."

She came to visit her on a scorching hot afternoon and suggested they should take a refreshing shower, explaining: " Let me give you a good wash, scrub your back and pour the water over you, just like your mother would have done, God rest her soul." And she started to cry. The woman heated some water and they went into the kitchen. As she was taking off her clothes, the old witch noticed her birthmark: a slice of watermelon, visible on her thigh. As soon as she saw it, she took to her heels to find the man. Immediately he heard, he went back to find her husband and tell him that he had had his wife, proving it by describing the mark on her thigh. "From now on I claim your fortune and you become my slave as agreed."

The merchant opened a doughnut shop to survive, dressed in rags and fried doughnuts, barefoot.

The woman was surprised at the old witch's disappearance. Time passed and the husband did no return. One day the bird told her "Do you know that my master is now in Mahdiyya, a slave to a fellow-merchant, making doughnuts for a living?" She immediately disguised herself in men's clothes, gathered provisions and all her heart's desires and asked her bird if he wanted anything from there. He told her "On your way back across the Sea, call out three times for Morjān, my cousin, and tell him : "Yaqut greets you and asks you how he can escape from his cage and leave this foreign land."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She gathered together provisions and all her heart's desires and left . In Mahdiyya she sought out her husband and enquired what had happened. He related the whole story to her. She told him "I have not been brought up to disgrace my family", and told him all about the old witch. She redeemed her husband and they sailed away together. When they came to the Red Sea, she called out: "Morjān, Morjān! Yaqūt greets you and asks you how to escape and leave this foreign land." Morjān replied "Why don't you just bang your

head against the wall?" When they arrived back home the parrot enquired "Did you talk to my cousin?" She answered "Of course I did." He asked "What did he say?" She replied "Bang your head against the wall." They had a good night's sleep. The following morning she got up to find the parrot dead in its cage. She wailed and cried and mourned him. The husband intervened "All this for a bird! I will buy you another one." He reached out for the bird and threw it on the rubbish heap. The parrot flew off

There we left them and we have never seen them since.

WALHA AND 'AYSHA

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there was a silk-merchant who had two daughters called Walha and 'Aysha. The two girls were of exceptional beauty. The merchant had a nephew who wanted to marry 'Aysha, but the merchant swore he would only give her in marriage to a suitor who could offer him three loads of gold as a bride-price, even if he were a Jew. The nephew was poor and humble and couldn't satisfy the father's greed and provide for his cousin. Walha, the elder girl, advised her cousin to travel and make his fortune and come back to claim her younger sister. For her part, she would not allow her younger sister to marry before her.

So the young man went to see his uncle and informed him he was going to France to seek his fortune. He made his uncle promise not to give 'Aysha to anyone else in the meantime.

One day, a rich Jew arrived, mounted on a fine horse, and asked for 'Aysha's hand, offering the required three loads of gold. The father was tempted, and agreed to give her in marriage. 'Aysha cried and wailed, but what could she do? *Such was the fate God had ordained for her.* The marriage took place, and 'Aysha soon took to her husband. He was kind and gentle, and showered her with gifts and attention.

Her cousin worked hard night and day to save up and came back to claim her. He found Walha grinding corn and singing this song "O cousin, what happened to you? A man has come to take her from you." The cousin was saddened by the news, but swore not to give up. Walha offered to help him win 'Aysha back.

'Aysha's husband, Khalifa, was very rich and owned huge estates. The cousin approached one of his shepherds, who told him everything he wanted to know about his master's wealth, his lands and his wife, who was kept locked up in a palace, and her blind mother-in-law kept the key. The shepherd was in the habit of massaging the old lady's head to help her fall asleep each evening. The cousin offered a purse of gold to the shepherd in exchange for his clothes, and went to the old lady in his place. As she drifted off to sleep under his soothing touch, he was able to steal the key to the palace. 'Aysha's husband was away on a trip. The cousin slipped into her room, surprised her and asked her to come with him. But 'Aysha refused, saying that she was now married and loved her husband. The cousin managed to catch her and carry her off.

On his way, he met the husband coming back on his horse, carrying quantities of meat and bottles of wine. The Jew quickly rescued his wife and tied her abductor to a tree. Then they sat before him, grilling the meat, eating and drinking. Gradually they became drunk and helpless. The cousin managed to untie himself and reached out for the Jew's sword. He stabbed him and slapped 'Aysha on the face to wake her. Then he bundled her onto the horse and made off.

When they arrived at his uncle's house, he was met by Walha, who soon took charge of her sister, slapping and scolding her, and saying "Shame on you! You're a disgrace to your family. You let down your cousin for a Jew, and indulged in drinking." Then she locked her in her room for three days.

After the customary three months' period of mourning had passed, 'Aysha was wedded to her cousin.

And they lived safely and procreated until daeth did them part.

THE BEDOUIN AND THE TROUSERS (S6)

Once upon a time there was a rich Bedouin who came to settle in Tunis. He was recommended *Ummi 'Aisha* the matchmaker to help him find a wife.

Ummi 'Aisha welcomed him and gave him some water to wash his feet. "Meanwhile, I shall prepare you some food from your provisions," she said. She opened his bag. To her surprise, it was full of gold, not wheat. She gaped, and went back to him, saying "You must go and wash in the baths." "What baths?" he asked. "Well, the public baths where anyone can go for a wash and massage," she answered. "But wait here."

She went to the old city and bought him a fine *barnūs*, 'cloak' and *jibba*. She tied them up in a cloth, added a silver box containing jasmine-scented *ṭfal*, 'washing-clay' and gave him two gold Louis from his own money. One was for the bath, and one for the barber, she instructed. The young bedouin went to the bath. At first he was received coolly, but when he showed the gold coins, the attendants rushed to serve him.

Ummi 'Aisha the go-between took good care of the young bedouin for seven days and seven nights, feeding him and looking after his needs and teaching him Beldi manners. One day, she said to him "I must now find you a fine bride." He said "That's a good idea." She went to ask for the hand of a modest Beldi family who, on hearing about the Bedouin's extreme wealthiness approved to celebrate the marriage the followig Thursday.

On the wedding day, the Bedouin was taken to the bridal chamber and left with the bride. The bedouin had never worn trousers or been to an in-door toilet. *Ummi 'Aisha* had made him many trousers and put them away in the chest. He needed to relieve. He took off his trousers and made for the bathroom. The bride was shocked. The bedouin, thinking she was shocked to see his trousers exclaimed: "I have got seven other metres in the chest!" The bride ran out of the room and asked immediately for a divorce.

THE OLD WITCH AND SATAN (S7)

Once upon a time, the old witch and Satan would bet on causing a couple to divorce. The old witch would say "You can't!" and he would reply "Of course I can! I'll show you." He found a pretext to make them quarrel. They argued and argued all night, but she ended by sleeping in his arms. Satan lost his bet.

It was now the old witch's turn. She put on her green robe and shawl, painted her stick green, took her rosary and went to the couple's house in the early afternoon. She knocked on the door, pushed it ajar and spoke to the woman through the crack. "It's time to pray; will you allow me to make my ablutions here?" The woman was taken in and allowed her to enter the house. The old witch made her ablutions, and said her prayers. The woman invited her to stay and lunch with her. When they sat down to eat the *couscous*, the old witch said "My daughter, I'm afraid I have got into the bad habit of eating with two spoons. Would you mind?" "Not at all, replied the mistress of the house." She brought another spoon and they began to eat. The old witch helped herself alternately from two different parts of the dish, so that it looked as if two guests had been eating. The husband arrived shortly and joined them. When he sat down, the old witch turned to the young woman and asked "Where is your guest?" "Guest? Which guest?" she answered. "The one who was eating here with us just now" the witch replied. "But there was no-one else!" the woman protested. The witch turned to the husband and pointed to the second spoon, saying "Look, here is his spoon, and there (pointing to the door of the room) are his slippers!" In fact, the old witch herself had surreptitiously dropped the slippers from under her robe on entering. The young woman was aghast, but her husband lost his temper and pronounced her thrice-divorced on the spot. The old witch left laughing in triumph.

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen,
while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness;
may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back
with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it
walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of
faith in Islam).

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there lived a sultan - and there is no sultan but Allāh - who had a son called Qamar ez-Zamān. He had him taught and instructed in all branches of the arts and sciences and chivalry. Qamar ez-Zamān came of age to marry. The sultan sent his vizier to consult the prince, but he would not agree to it. The sultan sent the vizier back on the same mission on several other occasions, but the prince persisted in his refusal. This angered the king, who decided to send him into exile in a distant abandoned palace, with the vizier for sole companion.

This palace was in fact inhabited by two demonesses, Queen Morjāna and Queen Maymūna. When Qamar ez-Zamān and the vizier went to sleep, the two demonesses came out of their hiding-place and marvelled at the prince's beauty. "Praise to God!" said Maymūna, "who created such beauty!" Morjāna replied "Fancy a father sending such a handsome boy into exile just because he didn't want to get married!" "Let's have some fun" suggested Maymūna.

In a far-away land lived Ḥusn al-Wujūd, the only daughter of a king, who also turned down all the suitors who sought her hand.

Maymūna suggested Ḥusn al-Wujūd would be a suitable bride for Qamar ez-Zamān. They left Qamar ez-Zamān sleeping and flew off to the land of Ḥusn al-Wujūd. They gave her a sleeping-potion and carried her back to Qamar ez-Zamān's palace, and laid

her by his side. When he woke up he found the beautiful maiden beside him. He tried to wake her up: "Sleeper, sleeper! Wake up!" But she wouldn't answer him. So he took off the ring with his seal and slipped it onto her finger. With that, he was put back to sleep. Ḥusn al-Wujūd was woken up, to find herself lying beside a handsome stranger. "Who can this fine young man be?" She shook him: "Sleeper, sleeper! Wake up!" But he wouldn't answer her. She took off her ring and slipped it onto his finger. With that, Ḥusn al-Wujūd was put back to sleep and carried back to her palace.

Qamar ez-Zamān woke up the following morning and looked for his partner of the night before. "Where is the beautiful maiden who was in my bed last night?" he asked the vizier. "Which maiden? There was no maiden." replied the vizier, bemused. Qamar ez-Zamān recounted to him all that had passed during the night. "Dear child!" exclaimed the vizier. "Take care not to repeat this story to anyone. They will say the sultan's son has gone mad." "But I'm not!" he protested. "I have told you nothing but the truth." The vizier, concerned, went to tell the sultan. Everybody was now convinced that the prince was suffering from hallucinations.

Qamar ez-Zamān took to his bed, his face turned a pale as straw and he slept in a consumptive bed. All the physicians and the magicians of the kigdom were summoned, but they all said he suffered neither from fever nore from sweatingn but from mere melancholy. The king and the court did all they could to cheer him up and dissipate his gloom, but for all their efforts he remained silent and brooded over what had happened the previous night.

Ḥusn al-Wujūd woke up the following morning and looked for her partner of the night before. "Where is the handsome youth who was in my bed last night?" she asked her mother. "Which youth? There was no youth." replied her mother, bemused. Ḥusn al-Wujūd recounted to her all that had passed during the night. "Dear child!" exclaimed her mother. "Take care not to repeat this story to anyone. They will say the king's daughter has gone mad." "But I'm not!" she protested. "I have told you nothing but the truth." The queen, concerned, went to tell the king that the princess was suffering from hallucinations.

Ḥusn al-Wujūd took to her bed, her face turned a pale as straw and she slept in a consumptive bed. All the physicians and the magicians of the kigdom were summoned, but they all said she suffered neither from fever nore from sweatingn but from mere melancholy. The king and the court did all they could to cheer her up and

dissipate her gloom, but for all their efforts she remained silent and brooded over what had happened the previous night.

The news of Qamar ez-Zamān's illness travelled to the village where lived a traditional bedouin healer, who set off at once to tend the prince. When he came before him, he said "Confide in me, and tell me the whole story." Qamar ez-Zamān recounted to him what had happened the previous night. The healer replied "Your cure is in my hands. I will bring her back to you, but you will have to come with me."

The prince gathered his strength, gathered provisions and all his hearts's desires, took leave of the king and set off with the bedouin. They crossed country after country, emptying one land and filling another, and no land can be filled except with our dear almighty God, crying out "Here is the healer of your afflictions, but the cure is in God's hands." At last they reached the land of Ḥusn al-Wujūd. The bedouin asked to attend the princess. Qamar ez-Zamān disguised himself as the healer's assistant and went in with him to her chamber. As soon as he entered, she recognised him and came to her senses. Qamar ez-Zamān, overjoyed to have found his beloved, rushed to the king and asked for her hand. The wedding was celebrated, even days and seven nights of festivities when no fire was lit and no food was cookd except in the sultan's house. At the end of this time the prince sought his father-in-law's permission to take her back to his own land for a second ceremony.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The prince and princess boarded a ship and set sail for Qamar ez-Zamān's land. They sailed and sailed until they reached an island where they put in to rest. They sat down under a palm-tree and Ḥusn al-Wujūd laid her head on the prince's lap and dozed off. Qamar ez-Zamān noticed the pearl necklace she was wearing and undid it to take a closer look. As he did so, a bird swooped down and snatched it from his hand. The prince ran after the bird as fast as he could, getting further and further from Ḥusn al-Wujūd until he had lost his way completely.

Ḥusn al-Wujūd waited and waited, and when he failed to return, thought "He must have abandoned me." She disguised herself as a man, sealed up her jars full of jewellery and settled down on a rock. Now this island was not far from Qamar ez-Zamān's father's land. As she sat there, the king's messenger passed by and happened to drop a letter he was carrying in a puddle. He cried and wailed "I fear my head will roll for this! What shall I do?" "Don't worry," replied Ḥusn al-Wujūd. "I'll write you

a new one." She fetched pen and paper and copied out the letter. Relieved, the messenger continued on his way to the palace.

Qamar ez-Zamān tried to retrace his steps, but without success. He decided to find work and settle down. He found an old man who tended a market-garden and asked him to take him on. The old man was alone in the world and welcomed the idea of adopting a son. "You will be my son, my child, and we will share whatever God sends us." Qamar ez-Zamān soon settled into the work, praying "O Almighty God, help me to find my lost bride, Ḥusn al-Wujūd." He explained to the old man that the ship bringing him back to his father's land had left its last port of call without him, and it would not come back until the next year.

The king's messenger arrived at the palace with the letter. On reading it, the king was amazed at the beauty of the calligraphy. "Who wrote this? Bring him to me!" he exclaimed. Frightened, the messenger rushed back to find the 'man' who had helped him. Ḥusn al-Wujūd was soon brought before the king and made his court scribe. Honoured and feted, the scribe soon gained the king's favour and attention, and was asked to marry the king's daughter. Ḥusn al-Wujūd replied "I shall never refuse you your wish." Back in her room, Ḥusn al-Wujūd cried and wept over her dilemma.

The festivities were held to celebrate the wedding. On the wedding-night the 'bridegroom' ignored his bride and slept apart. The following day, the bride's mother enquired how the bridal night had passed. "He didn't come to me, but slept on his own," she explained sadly. "There, there, don't fret, my child. It was only the first night after all," replied her mother, "he must have been shy." The second and third nights passed in the same way. The bride's mother grew concerned and advised her daughter to say to him "The Prophet sent you a gift. Do you take it or leave it?"

That night the bride did as she was advised and said to her groom "The Prophet sent you a gift. Do you take it or leave it?" Ḥusn al-Wujūd burst into tears when she heard this. "Confide in me," urged the bride, "and tell me the whole truth." "I am a woman just like you," Ḥusn al-Wujūd replied. "I promise to get my husband to marry you as well, when I find him." Behind closed doors, they vowed eternal friendship. The following morning the mother was comforted to hear that the marriage was consummated.

Meanwhile, Qamar ez-Zamān continued to work hard for the old man, praying that he would be re-united with his beloved. One day, he surprised two birds fighting over a

necklace. One of them swallowed it. The other struck it, and it fell to the floor, dead. Qamar ez-Zamān rushed to pick up the dead bird, open its crop and remove the necklace, which he sealed in a jar. He heard that the ship had put into port again and they were looking for him. He rushed to the old man to bid him goodbye. "My destiny is accomplished. I must go.", he announced. "My dear son, don't let me die alone in this land of infidels. I feel my hour has come." The ship was to be in harbour for a month. Qamar ez-Zamān was hoping the old man's condition would improve before he had to leave, but Fate caught up with him and he died. Qamar ez-Zamān buried him and carried out all the mourning rituals as befitted a son. By then, the ship had left and Qamar ez-Zamān had been left behind again.

A new day is born and he prays for the Prophet will be blessed. He resumed work, praying to Almighty God to re-unite him with his beloved. The following year, the ship called again, with Husn al-Wujūd on board. They were eventually re-united, but Ḥusn al-Wujūd recounted her story and asked him to pose as her brother. She said to him "The princess has kept my secret and I promised her you would take her as a wife." "But I can't do that!" he exclaimed. "You are my only wife." "It must be," she insisted.

Qamar ez-Zamān was received as an honoured guest for three days and three nights. In private, he took the princess as his second wife. After some time, Ḥusn al-Wujūd obtained permission to take her bride to her father's land, together with her supposed brother. When they arrived, they were warmly welcomed, and all three settled there together.

There we left them, and we have never seen them since.

THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER (S9)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there was a fisherman from Kelibia who was poor but managed to make a meagre living. He was happily married and had a daughter called 'Aysha. 'Aysha's m'allma was a widow and always enquired about 'Aysha's parents and whether they were happy. 'Aysha always answered that they were happy, thank God, and loved each other. The ma'allma was jealous and wanted to get rid of the wife, to take her place. So one day, she put a scorpion in a small box and gave it to 'Aysha, instructing her to empty it in the cuscus jar in the pantry. One day, the fisherman's wife had made her husband promise that if she died, he would wait until 'Aysha was as tall as the nail she had driven into the wall before remarrying. The husband said "May God grant you long life." She replied "Our span is in God's hands."

A week later, the m'allma told 'Aysha to ask her mother to give her some cuscus. When 'Aysha's mother went to get the *couscous*, she was bitten by the scorpion, and died. "Such is the fate that God has decreed" the man thought resignedly. The daughter grieved for her mother's death, but was immediately taken in by the m'allma, who looked after her, bathing her and changing her clothes. One day, she asked her "Why doesn't your father remarry?" She replied "I don't know. I will ask him." When she came home that day, she asked her father "Why don't you find another

wife?" He answered "I promised your mother I wouldn't remarry until you reached that nail up there."

On the following day, 'Aysha related this to her m'allma, who soon made plans to visit her home on the pretext of offering to clean it. When she came to the house, she went straight to the nail and lowered it. She cleaned the house, cooked the dinner and waited for the fisherman's return. When he came back, she served him a delicious dinner and said "You really ought to have a woman to look after you and your daughter, you know." He said "I promised my late wife, God rest her soul, not to remarry until 'Aysha was as tall as that nail in the wall." She said "Let's try her." When they did, to his surprise, Aisha came up to the height of the nail. 'Aysha said "Now you can remarry, and my m'allma is the right person for you." So the father and the m'allma eventually got married and she moved in with them.

The ma'allma also had a daughter called Hafsa. Hafsa was pampered and spoilt and taught embroidery and lace-making, and 'Aysha was always asked to do the dirty jobs; cleaning, and washing the floor. From early morning till nightfall, 'Aysha would sweep the floor, do the washing and cooking; who cares the loving mother is in the grave. She would cry her eyes out remembering her dead mother. *We were neither thanked nor praised.* Her stepmother maltreated her and spoilt her own daughter. One day, the fisherman came back home as usual with fish for dinner. 'Aysha, as usual, was told to gut and clean them. As she started the job, one of the fish spoke to her. "Set me free and I will make you rich." 'Aysha took the fish and threw it in the well. When her stepmother counted the fish she found one missing. She questioned 'Aysha about it. She answered "As I was washing it, it fell down the well." Her stepmother gave her a good hiding and shut her up in the washhouse on the roof with a bag of corn to grind. Her father tried to reason with his wife, but she wouldn't back down.

So 'Aysha found herself upstairs, weeping and wailing, in the dark. She became thirsty and started to whine. Suddenly the room lit up and she found a well made of silver with a golden chain. When she let down the bucket to draw water, she heard a sheep saying "'Aysha, give me some water." Before she drank herself, she gave him some. So he said "May you have the softness of my fleece." As she was about to drink, a gazelle appeared, asking "Give me some water." She gave her some, and the gazelle answered "May you have my eyes." Again, as she was about to drink, there

appeared a rose, saying "Give me some water." She gave her some, and the rose said "May you have my perfume and my bloom." Again, as she was about to drink, a cypress-tree emerged asking, "Aysha, give me some water." She gave her some, and the cypress-tree said, "May you have my height." As she went to drink again, a jasmine blossom appeared, saying "I'm thirsty; give me some water." She gave her some, and the jasmine said "May your tears, every time you weep, be pearls and jewels streaming down your face." At last, 'Aysha was able to quench her thirst and a fish appeared, saying "Didn't I tell you you would be rewarded for setting me free?" The fish spent the rest of the night finishing 'Aysha's tasks for her: picking over the grain, grinding and sifting it.

Her stepmother got up early in the morning and went up to see if 'Aysha had done what she had been told to. When she opened the door she was amazed at what she saw. She exclaimed "Where did all this come from? Tell me!" 'Aysha said "I don't know. I have spent the night working at the grain." The stepmother did not believe her and beat her cruelly. As she wept, tears of pearls and gemstones streamed down her face. This fuelled the stepmother's anger, and she went straight away to her own daughter, Hafsa, instructing her to do what her sister had done. She gave her some fish to clean. As she started her task, one of the fish spoke to her. "Set me free, and I will reward you." 'Aysha's stepsister answered "Never! I want to enjoy your flesh." The fish leapt up, saying "You will regret it" 'Aysha's stepsister was then given a second task, to pick over and grind the grain in the washhouse on the roof. She was dragged there, weeping and wailing, and locked in. She started the job, unwillingly, then felt thirsty, so she drew some water from the well. As she was about to drink, a sheep appeared and asked "Give me some water, Hafsa." She replied "Not on your life. I'm thirsty - I drink first." So he cursed her "May you have my wool matted with burrs." As she went to drink a second time, a gazelle appeared, saying "Give me some water." She replied "Never!" The gazelle cursed her "May you have my behind for your face!" As she went to drink, the rose appeared, saying "Give me some water." She replied "What? Give you water when I'm thirsty myself?" So the rose cursed her "May you have my thorns." As she went again to drink, the cypress-tree appeared, saying "Give me some water." She answered "Never!" So the cypress-tree cursed her "May you have my thorns and brushwood entangling your feet when you walk, and serpents and scorpions streaming down your face when you cry." As she was about to drink, the jasmine blossom appeared, saying "Give me some water." She refused. So the jasmine cursed her "May you have my greenness." As she was about to drink,

undisturbed, at last, she felt a change coming over her. So she cursed her mother "It's all my mother's fault, damn her!"

Early in the morning, her mother hurried upstairs to see the result of the night's work. She was shocked at what she saw. She lamented over her daughter's horrible transformation and wept bitterly until her heart broke and she died.

'Aysha was spoilt and pampered by her father, and many suitors came to ask for her hand. She chose the finest one, and her father gave orders to celebrate the wedding seven days and seven nights.

And they lived happily and procreated until death did them part.

THE BASIL PLANT (S10)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there was a girl called 'Aysha, the only daughter of a poor family. She had a basil plant on her terrace, which she tended carefully. She used to go to the m'allma's house every day; going in the morning and coming back in the afternoon to water her plant. She never missed a day. The sultan's house was opposite hers. One day, as she was watering her plant, the sultan's son caught sight of her and spoke to her, thus: "'Aysha, water your plant and tend it well, and tell me how many leaves it has." She answered "O sultan's son, you are learned and educated. You tell me how many salaries does your father pay out every month? And how many stars there are in the sky?" Surprised, the sultan's son thought to himself "How arrogant she is!! Each day the same scene was repeated, until he decided to teach her a lesson for her arrogance.

He went to see her *ma'allma* and asked her to help him play a trick on 'Aysha. At first she objected, not wanting to harm her favourite, 'Aysha. Then she agreed. She told him "Go into to the dark cellar and I will send her down." 'Aysha was sent, unwillingly, to fetch her *ma'allma's* spindle, which she had left there. When 'Aysha got there it was dark and gloomy, so she snatched up the spindle and made to leave. But the sultan's son caught hold of her and tickled her. 'Aysha squealed "*Ma'llma!*

Help! Someone's tickling me! Someone's tickling me!" This was all the sultan's son wanted to hear, so he let her go.

That day, as she was watering her plant, the sultan's son asked her the same ritual question: "'Aysha, water your plant and tend it well, and tell me how many leaves it has." She answered "O sultan's son, you are learned and educated. You tell me how many salaries does your father pay out every month? And how many stars there are in the sky?" To this the sultan's son replied mockingly "*Ma'allma!* Help! Someone's tickling me! Someone's tickling me!" 'Aysha thought to herself "So that's who it was!"

Time passed, and a week later 'Aysha slipped into the sultan's house one night, as the door was always open, and made her way to the sultan's son's room. She hid behind the curtains. The sultan's son came in, laid down on his bed and fell asleep. 'Aysha crept out from her hiding-place and crossed to the bed in the darkness. She shook him so violently that he woke up with a great start, exclaiming "The Angel of Death has come to claim me!" This was all 'Aysha wanted to hear, and she slipped quietly away again, leaving the prince oblivious to what was going on.

The next morning, she went as usual to her *ma'allma's* house, then came back to water her plant. The sultan's son was waiting for her, and asked: "'Aysha, water your plant and tend it well, and tell me how many leaves it has." She answered "O sultan's son, you are learned and educated. You tell me how many salaries does your father pay out every month? And how many stars there are in the sky?" To this the sultan's son replied mockingly "*Ma'allma!* Help! Someone's tickling me! Someone's tickling me!" Aisha responded mockingly "The Angel of Death has come to claim me!" The sultan's son thought "My God! So that's who it was! But now she's playing with my life! This time I'll really teach her a lesson she won't forget."

The following day he went to see her father, asking for her hand. Her father answered: "I would give her to you as a servant, never mind as a wife!" But 'Aysha herself was suspicious of the sultan's son's real intention. She accepted the proposal, but stipulated to her father that an underground tunnel must be dug between their house and that of the sultan. On the wedding-day 'Aysha was brought with full honours to the palace, but the prince put her in a cell-like room with only one window, and locked her in. Through the window he said to her "You don't think I married you out of love, do you? Now tell me who has the upper hand?" She answered "Women." The prince was surprised at her persistent arrogance. Every day he brought her a loaf of bread, a

handful of olives and a jug of water. Every day he would ask her the same ritual question "Who has the upper hand?" She would answer "Women." Each day 'Aysha would slip away through the secret tunnel back to her parents' home, eat her fill, relax and amuse herself with her mother and father and go back in time for the ritual questioning.

One day he came and told her he was going on a pleasure trip to Sfax, and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. 'Aysha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man and started her trip to Sfax. The prince travelled during the day and rested throughout the night and she travelled night and day emptying one land and filling another, and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king arrived, she dressed herself in a white embroidered costume, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the middle of her tent within sight of the king who, seeing her beauty, (as men can never resist women), asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells salted chickpeas to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling chickpeas!" The vizier answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" The king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a plate of chickpeas and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the chickpeas to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to sleep with the woman. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal armband with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate, laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due.

The king arrived, gave her her 'sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions

'Aysha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin taughtening on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Tūr. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The child was put in the care of a wet-nurse, then a tutor who was entrusted with his religious education and general knowledge.

Time passed. One day the king came and told 'Aysha he was going on a pleasure trip to Bizert and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. Aisha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man and started her trip to Bizert. She travelled night and day emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king arrived, she dressed herself in a pink embroidered costume, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the middle of her tent within sight of the king. When he saw her beauty, he asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells salted beans to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling salted beans" The vizier answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" The king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a plate of salted beans and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the salted beans to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to spend the night with the woman. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal chain of office with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate, laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due. The king arrived, gave her her 'sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions

'Aysha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tauhtening skin on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Šūr. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale. The child was put in the care of a wet-nurse, then a tutor who was entrusted with his religious education and general knowledge.

One day he came and told her he was going on a pleasure trip to Kairouan, and asked her if she needed anything from there. She answered "May you come back safely. I have a sister there who is very like me. Give her my love." The king was to travel the following day. 'Aysha went back home that evening through the tunnel and asked her father to organise a travelling-party for her: guards, tents, and provisions. She dressed herself as a man and started her trip to Kairouan, travelling night and day. She arrived two days before the king and set up camp. The day the king arrived, she dressed herself in her best clothes, made herself up carefully, perfumed herself and sat in the middle of her tent within sight of the king who, seeing her beauty, asked his vizier to go and ask her to grant him her favours. The vizier went to see her and said "Our master the king greets you and asks if you would like to spend the night with him." She answered "I would be honoured, but on condition that he wears a peasant's costume and sells salted doughnuts to my guards, barefoot and bareheaded. When he has finished, he is welcome to join me."

Outraged, the vizier went to see the king and related what had happened. The king said "The bitch! How dare she ask a king of my status to walk barefoot and bareheaded selling doughnuts!" The vizier answered "You are in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knows you here. What of it, if you did it and then had a good time?" Thinking of the night's delight, the king answered "It wouldn't do any harm. Get me a tray of doughnuts and let me go and sell them." He dressed himself as a peasant and went out to sell the doughnuts to the guards, who made fun of him. When he finished, he went back to his tent, bathed and dressed and went to spend the night with the woman. She said to him "Give me something as proof that you have spent the night with me." He gave her his royal ring with his seal engraved on it. After a week, the king informed her that he was leaving the following day. She left early before sunrise, and reached her parent's house, ate, laughed with her sisters and went back to her cell before the king was due.

The king arrived, gave her her 'sister's greetings, passed her the loaf of bread through the window and asked her the same ritual questions: "Who has the upper hand?"

She answered "woman."

'Aysha conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of tauhtening skin on bone. She gave birth in her parents' home to a child as beautiful as the moon which she named Bint frūkh al-Rūm. The baby crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but just in a couple of words in a tale.

One day, news reached 'Aysha that the king was going to marry his cousin. She asked when the bride's trousseau ceremony was to be brought. They told her Thursday. She bathed her children and dressed them and had each one wear one of the king's royal insignia. She asked Dāda to take them to the king's palace. She instructed her children to mess things up in the palace and if they were reprimanded they should answer that it was their father's house and they had every right to do as they pleased. The children did as instructed, broke the bride's new plates and glasses, and used the embroidered silk cushions as horses, and whenever anyone reprimanded them they answered again "It is our father's house and we have every right to do as we please." The bride's mother was horrified and asked for the bridegroom to come and see for himself what was going on. When he came and saw them, he recognised his ring, armband and chain of office, and it dawned on him that that was one of 'Aysha's ruses. He quickly went to see 'Aysha and told her "You've taken me in again." She said "Of course I have. Don't you see that I saved my father, so how could I not save my own self? He asked her "What about my wedding tonight?" She answered "Go and see your uncle and tell him that you have a chest and that you have lost its golden key. You asked to have a new silver one made, but in the meantime you found the one you had lost. Ask him what you should do." He went to see his future father-in-law and related the story to him. He answered "I can't see why you should have a new key made since you have found the old one." The prince said "Keep your daughter; I have found my wife."

That night's celebration became 'Aysha's postponed wedding. Seven days and seven nights here no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house, and 'Aysha was finally united with her husband and children and they all lived safely and procreated until death did them part

THE BIRD WITHOUT WING (S11)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with cotton, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there was a silk merchant whom God granted seven sons and one daughter. The girl's mother took good care in giving her good up-bringing, modesty and propriety and taught her all the domestic skills; embroidery, knitting, sewing, cooking, and the girl never set foot outside. She sat every day embroidering on the terrace. One day the prince's bird flew off so he followed it from roof to roof, until he came near where the girl sat engrossed in her embroidery. He saw her and marvelled at her beauty.

He went back to the palace; his face turned as pale as straw and he slept in a sick bed. All the court physicians were summoned to cure him, but they all said that he was suffering neither from sweating nor from fever, but from depression. Story-tellers were brought to entertain the prince but he refused access to them all, and asked instead for the old witch. When she came, he confided his secret to her and she promised to bring the girl to him.

The old witch dressed herself in a green robe, put on a green shawl, picked up a green stick and went out to search for the girl's house. When she arrived in front of the house, she sat on the doorstep. The maid was washing the floor and accidentally splashed the old woman. The old witch shouted "What have I done to you, a pious old woman like me?" "Forgive me! I didn't mean to." The maid exclaimed. *Old women*

were respected in those days. On hearing the commotion, the mistress went out to investigate. She saw the old witch, who complained to her about the incident. So the mistress of the house invited her to come in and change her wet clothes.

Now, out of concern to keep her secluded, the merchant had had a private apartment built on the upper floor for his daughter's use. The old witch came in, changed into dry clothes offered by the mistress, and enquired whether the woman lived on her own. The mistress replied "I have a daughter, God bless her, who lives upstairs." Soon the sons and the father came back from work to have supper. The old witch was invited to join them, as custom dictated that guests present at meal-times should be fed. Over the meal, she entertained them with tales of the Prophet (God have mercy on him) and jokes. When night fell, the old witch made as if to leave. But the mistress of the house and her daughter were greatly entertained by her company and begged her to stay three days and nights with them, as was the tradition established by the Prophet (God have mercy on him.) So she stayed three days and three nights with the girl in her private apartment before leaving.

A week later, she came back and everybody gave her a warm welcome, offering her gifts. By now she had become almost a member of the household, respected and revered. One day, she came to the house and informed the merchant's wife: saying: "my daughter, my only daughter, is getting married the following Thursday and that I wanted her sister, your daughter, to attend her *Henna*. The mistress apologised, saying "She's not allowed out. Her father and brothers would kill me if she stepped across the threshold." The old witch convinced her that nobody would be in the know: they could take her in the evening and come back in the early morning, before the men of the house were up. The mistress persisted in refusing, but the old witch eventually talked her into accepting. On Thursday evening, the girl put on her best clothes and finery and went out.

Her mother gave her a handkerchief full of sand to mark her path, as she had never before ventured outside the house, in case she lost her way.

The girl and the old witch walked and walked until the girl was exhausted and enquired "Haven't we arrived yet?" "Soon, my dear" the old woman replied. Eventually they came to a house and went in. She found a handsome young man waiting for them. The girl soon understood she was trapped. But she hadn't forgotten to sprinkle the sand along her way. The old witch took a purse of gold from the man and left. The young man welcomed her and invited her to dine with him. Meanwhile, the girl's

mother began to worry when her daughter did not return as planned, and paced anxiously up and down.

The young man and the girl ate, and talked and laughed, and she did not let on that she realised she had been taken in and that her family's honour, was at stake, concentrating instead on forming a secret plan of escape. He said "It's time to sleep." She said "Indeed" and asked him to leave her while she put on the nightgown they gave her. Then she asked to go to the bathroom. The prince, not trusting her, said "I'll show you the way." She answered "Don't you trust me? I'm not about to run away from such a handsome young man." But he suggested "Let me tie you with my *shemla*, 'cummerbund', so that you can't run away." He did so, and she went to the bathroom with the shemla tied around her ankle. As she returned, she found two doves settled in the courtyard. She hurriedly untied the shemla and attached it to the two doves, and ran away in her nightgown.

The prince waited and waited, while the girl ran and ran, following the trail of sand, until she reached her home. Her mother, seeing her dressed only in a nightgown, feared the worst, but the girl reassured her: "nothing had happened *al-ḥamdu lillāh*, 'thanks to God', I am my mother's daughter I have not been brought up to disgrace my family, I had to abandon my clothes and jewels; a small price to pay."

When she failed to return, the prince pulled the *shemla*, and to his great disappointment discovered two doves at the other end of it. He immediately went back to the palace, his face turned as pale as straw and he slept in a sick bed. All the court's physicians were summoned and they all said that he was suffering neither from fever nor from sweating, but from depression. The king, concerned about his only son, said "name what you want and I will have it brought for you." The prince answered "I want to rule for three days." The king replied "The kingdom will one day be in your hands, sooner or later." The prince announced that he had had a dream, and he would give a reward to whoever could best interpret it for him. The dream was :

"A bird without wings and beak took to the air
It came to me decked in finery and left in a petticoat."

All the members of the different merchants' guilds came to give their interpretations of the dream. Finally came the turn of the girl's brothers. The topic had been discussed at home. The girl suggested the following interpretation to her favorite youngest brother and asked him to relate it to the prince. "If it hadn't flown it would have brought shame

on seven brothers' *shashiyya* , 'red knitted caps' and their father's. Propose, and do not sully the honour of the merchant's family."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The youngest brother's turn came, he sought permission to speak to the prince privately. This was granted, and he recounted his interpretation of the dream saying: " if it had'nt flown it would have brought shame on seven men and their father. Propose, and do not sully the honour of the merchant's family." On hearing it, the prince hurried to his father and asked him to go and ask for the hand of the merchant's daughter. The king did so and the wedding was planned for the following Thursday. The order was given to celebrate the wedding seven days and seven nights where no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. Now the girl did not trust the prince, and feared that he had asked for her hand only to take his revenge on her. So she asked a Jewish pastry-cook to make her a life-size marzipan doll filled up to the neck with pistachio syrup. When it was ready, she dressed it in a replica of her own wedding outfit and veil, and asked to have it brought with her to the bridal chamber. On her wedding-day, a carriage was sent for the bride. The doll went with her. When she came to the bridal chamber, she sat it in her place in the centre of the room and hid herself behind the curtains. The groom came to welcome her, saying "You made fun of me; I swear by the land which bore your father and mine, I will strike off your head." And with a single blow, he struck the head off. As he did so, a drop of the syrup splashed into his mouth. He exclaimed "You are as sweet in death as you were in life! My life is not worth living." And he went to decapitate himself. But the merchant's daughter shouted "don't do it!" The prince was surprised and exclaimed "This is another one of your tricks!" She replied "Surely it is better to marry me honourably than to seduce and abandon me?" He replied "You are the queen among women. You shall be my wife in this world and the next." He kissed her on her forehead and

they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

THE SILK MERCHANT AND HIS NEIGHBOUR (S12)

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there was a handsome master silk merchant who lived next door to a beautiful married woman. The merchant desired the woman, and the attraction was mutual. One day, the woman went to the Turkish bath and had her body hair removed, her hair tinted with henna, *dabgha* we *ḥarqūs*, 'beauty spots applied', her teeth polished with swék 'tooth-stick' and her eyebrows dyed. Thus prepared, she perfumed herself and put on her best clothes, covered herself with her *sifsāri* (wrap) and went to see the silk merchant.

She greeted him and he welcomed her warmly, saying "What can I do for you, Madam? Your every wish will be fulfilled." "I want a fine *fūta* (an African wrap skirt)" she replied. He suggested "I will weave you one with silk and gold stripes, to match your beauty." "How much?" she asked. "It's free for you, if you come into the back shop with me..." "When will it be ready?" she asked. He replied "This very afternoon." "Then I might as well wait," she answered.

The merchant abandoned what he had been doing and set up his loom for her *fūta*. The woman let her *sefsāri* fall and sat in front of the weaver. She gradually lifted the hem of her dress, showing her bare legs and thighs. The merchant looked up and caught sight of her most intimate places. Agitated, he began to sing a popular song, which went "Don't stop, don't stop, just let me enjoy it". She tried to engage him in conversation, but he just went on weaving and singing, and she went on gradually lifting her skirt. After some time, she decided to go home and return in the afternoon to collect her *fūta*.

The weaver went on weaving, impatient to eat the fresh fruit, and daydreaming of the beautiful woman and the merriment the afternoon held in store for him. He waited and waited, but the woman failed to return, so he decided to go and deliver the *fūta* himself. He went next door and knocked. To his surprise, it was the husband who answered, but he came out with a stick and beat the merchant mercilessly, to punish him for attempting to seduce his *ḥurma* (wife, therefore forbidden).

THE PEASANT AND THE BELDI (S13)

Once upon a time there was a rich Beldi who lived in Tunis. One day as he sat on the verandah of his Villa he heard a woman beggar asking for alms. He leaned over the parapet to have a closer look at her and was amazed at her beauty under her ragged appearance, saying "Praise to God the Creator who created such a beauty as fair as the moon". He hastily called his black servant and asked him to summon her to him. When she came before him he said to her "Such beauty is not meant to be hidden under rags. You should be honoured and raised to the ranks of dignitaries. Will you marry me?" The woman was delighted and answered "I will be more than honoured. He who wants to be generous needs no advice." He then called his mother and asked her to prepare her for the wedding the following Thursday.

The young woman was taken to the baths, where two harza attended to her, washing her and dressing her hair. Thereafter, the celebration of the wedding lasted seven days and seven nights. The man was delighted with his beautiful new bride and was happy.

When the wedding was over, the young bride never agreed to sit and share a meal with him, saying she wasn't hungry. "She must be shy" he explained to his mother, "Let's give her time to get used to it." Two weeks passed and still the young bride would not eat with her husband. The king was worried that his bride wasn't eating, and yet she didn't seem to be losing weight. "I must unravel the mystery," he thought. So he decided to watch her.

Now there was a big cupboard in the bride's bedroom. While no-one was looking, she would take some of the food and hide it in the cupboard. When nobody was around, she would go to the cupboard and take out some food, saying "God bless your generosity!" and then start to eat.

The king watched her for three days and realised what she was doing. Appalled, he thought "Curse the woman! I can't live with a beggar." He called her and said, "I wanted to make a civilised human being of you, but it's useless. You were born a bedouin beggar; you will die a bedouin beggar. I have kept your rags - put them on and go. You were not made for such an honour. 'What's bred in the bone comes out in the blood.' "

THE INNOCENT VIRGIN (summary S14)

Once upon a time there was a man who wanted to marry an innocent virgin with no sexual knowledge. So he sought the help of the local *khātba*, 'matchmaker'. One day she came and told him: "I have found the one you are looking for. Her father, out of concern for her seclusion, has used the 'seven locks'. Delighted, the man went to ask for the daughter's hand. Her father agreed to marry her to him and they came to an agreement.

On the wedding night, after they were alone in the bridal chamber the man, wanting to test 'her innocence', asked her the following question: "Do you know what this is?, exposing himself to her.

"Oh! yes ", she answered. " It is a cock! "

Appalled, the man sent her back in shame the very same night to her father's house.

A week later he called the same matchmaker and asked her to find him a completely innocent virgin. When asked the same ritual question, the new bride gave the same answer as the first one. She was repudiated too.

The third bride answered: "I don't know" to the question which was put to her likewise to test her innocence. The man was delighted. "This is the one I am looking for, I must be gentle with her", he thought to himself. That night the marriage was not consummated. Three days later, he said to her: "I'll teach you what this is, pointing down to that which was between his thighs, "this is a cock!". "Is that what you call a cock!" she answered scornfully. "My paternal cousin's *wild 'ammi*, is this big! showing her forearm, "my maternal cousin's, *wild khāli*, is this big, my neighbour's is this big.....

TEACH BELDI MANNERS (S15)

Once upon a time there was a rich Bedouin who came to settle in Tunis. He was recommended *Ummi* 'Aisha the matchmaker to teach him Beldi manners and help him find a Beldi wife.

Ummi "Aisha welcomed him and gave him some water to wash his feet. "Meanwhile, I shall prepare you some food from your provisions," she said. She opened his bag. To her surprise, it was full of gold, not wheat. She gaped, and went back to him, saying "You must go and wash in the baths." "What baths?" he asked. "Well, the public baths where anyone can go for a wash and massage," she answered. "But wait here."

She went to the old city and bought him a fine *barnus*, 'cloak' and *jibba*. She tied them up in a cloth, added a silver box containing jasmine-scented *tfal*, 'washing-clay' and gave him two gold Louis from his own money. One was for the bath, and one for the barber, she instructed. The young bedouin went to the bath. At first he was received coolly, but when he showed the gold coins, the attendants rushed to serve him.

Ummi 'Aisha, the go-between, took good care of the young bedouin for seven days and seven nights, feeding him and looking after his needs and teaching him Beldi manners. One day, she said to him "I must find you a fine bride." He said "That's a good idea." She went on "Take this apple. Go and find a girl you fancy, throw your apple at her, and I will go and ask for her hand for you."

The young bedouin went to Bab Souika. It was summertime, and the barrow-boys were selling beautiful melons. "Why don't I buy one of those instead of the apple?" he thought. So he bought one, and went and stood in front of the Turkish baths. All kinds of girls came and went; short and tall, dark and fair, but not one appealed to him. The *qāḍi*'s pregnant wife came out of the bath wrapped in her silk veil. He immediately took a shine to her, and threw the melon, which hit her on the belly. This sent her into labour and she gave birth on the spot. The bedouin was arrested and beaten to death.

THE WOMAN WITH TWO (S16)

There was a man who wanted to marry a woman with two. Every time he sent to ask for the hand of a girl, he made it a condition that she must have two. All the girls replied that they had only one, and so they were not eligible for marriage. There was a cunning young girl who heard about the man and decided to trick him. "I have two" she said. And so the marriage was celebrated.

It was customary for the young bride to be prepared for her wedding by a *Hannāna*, who would tint the bride's hair and hands with henna and shave off all her body hair. This girl had asked the *Hannāna* to leave half of her pubic hair unshaved. On the wedding night the marriage was consummated, but the bride allowed the bridegroom to see only half her body, and saved the rest for later. (How could she hide it, when both her legs were apart?)

One day the husband informed his bride that he was leaving on business and that he wanted to take the spare one with him to play with! The young bride said "Of course!" Before he left, she caught a bird, put it in a tin, and gave it to him, and told him to be careful with it. Delighted, the husband set off with the tin in his pocket.

One evening, he felt horny and reached for the tin in his pocket. "It's always useful", he thought, "to have two." And he opened the tin. The bird flew away. He ran after it, but eventually had to give up. In the meantime, the young bride shave the rest of her pubic hair. Soon the husband came back, saying "Something horrible has happened. I've lost the spare one." The girl shouted "How awful! I told you to be careful." He answered "Thank God you've still got one left." And they enjoyed the newly-shaved one together.

THE WOMAN WITH THREE (S17)

There was a man who wanted to marry a woman with three. Every time he sent to ask for the hand of a girl, he made it a condition that she must have three. All the girls replied that they had only one, and so they were not eligible for marriage. There was a cunning young girl who heard about the man and decided to trick him. "I have three" she said. And so the marriage was celebrated.

It was customary for the young bride to be prepared for her wedding by a *Ḥannāna*, who would tint the bride's hair and hands with Henna and shave off all her body hair. This girl had asked the *Ḥannāna* to leave all of her pubic hair unshaved. On the wedding night the marriage was consummated. "What is your first one called?" the bridegroom asked her. *al-mghafghaf*, 'The bushy one' she replied. They enjoyed the bushy one for weeks and weeks, until he felt like a change. "Let's have the other one" he said to her "tonight". The young bride had her pubic hair removed, leaving a single tuft of hair. That night, they enjoyed the new one. "What is your second one called?" her husband asked. *bu quṣṣa*, 'the one with the fringe' she replied. Again, they enjoyed the one with the fringe for weeks, until he felt like a change. "Let's enjoy your third one tonight" he suggested. That day the young bride had her pubic hair all removed. That night they enjoyed the newly-shaved one. "What do you call this one?" he asked jokingly. *Al-fartaṣ*, 'the bald one' she answered. "I think I like it best." And they enjoyed the bald one from then on.

Once upon a time there was a rich man who was happily married to a wife who loved him. He called her *Lilla* and she called him *Sīdi*. Then one day, his wife came and said to him "Why don't you will me your fortune, if you really love me? We don't know what Fate may have in store for us. If you were to die, I would be lost without you and unprovided for."

He replied "There'll be time enough for that." But the woman persisted and nagged day after day until he agreed to do so; after all, he could trust his own wife. So he signed all his property over to her. Some time later, her attitude towards him changed completely. Some days she would cook for him and some days she would refuse. He enquired "Why are you being so difficult?" She replied "If you don't like it, you know what you can do. After all, the house is mine, and everything in it."

One day, he came back from work as usual and knocked on the door, but his wife shouted "Help! A stranger is breaking into my house." The man begged her to open the door, trying to reason with her, but she wouldn't. He gave up. But soon his wife put on her veil and made for the *qāḍi's* house: her husband followed her. Now, the *qāḍi* was known to be a womaniser. When they came before him she complained "This stranger is harassing me." He says he has a claim on my property." The husband intervened "But I signed it over to you in the first place!" She replied "What are you talking about? I don't even know you." The *qāḍi* pronounced judgement against him and he was flogged mercilessly.

A few weeks passed. The man sat in a café, sad and weighed down by his predicament. A friend of his noticed his gloom and enquired "What's the matter? What's bothering you?" He explained "I'm my own worst enemy. I was happy and contented until I signed all my property over to my wife. She led me a merry dance and the final straw was when she threw me out of my own house." His friend replied "You must be mad! How could you trust a woman, and sign over your fortune to her? Don't you know God has made them from a crooked rib?" The husband replied "She sweet-talked me into it." His friend recommended "Why don't you seek the help of the *qāḍi's* wife? She is known to be fair and able to redress the wrong. She knows her husband is a womaniser and will always decide in favour of a woman, and have her. I'm sure she would welcome the chance to get her own back on him."

The husband bought a few kilos of fish and went to see the qāḍi's wife. She talked to him through the door-grille. *Women could not come face to face with men outside the family* and he recounted what had happened. She replied "Come back and see me in three days."

As it is the tradition to cook *Couscous* on Fridays, the qadi's wife informed her husband that he was going to have chicken *Couscous* that evening. She prepared a nice rich chicken Couscous, as well as a plain and simple one with the left-over grain. Towards sunset, she set the table with the chicken *Couscous* and sat waiting. Her husband came back, lifted the lid of the dish and was delighted by the smell of the *Couscous*. Then he went to change his clothes. Meanwhile, his wife substituted the plain *Couscous* for the chicken one. After saying his evening prayer, the qāḍi sat down to eat. But when he lifted the lid, to his surprise there was no chicken, and the Couscous was poor and coarse. He enquired angrily "Where's the chicken Couscous I just saw?" The wife replied "You're crazy. There was no chicken." He insisted "But there was!" She replied "That's all we have."

Beside himself with anger, the qāḍi rushed off to complain to her father. Meanwhile, his wife replaced the chicken *Couscous* on the table. When the qadi came back with her father, they were astonished to find such a delicious meal laid out. The father told him off and left. But when the qadi came back, lo and behold, there was no chicken *Couscous*! He rushed back again to his father-in-law, explaining that he now had grounds for divorce. This time, the wife's father and brothers came to settle the dispute once and for all. Meanwhile, she had changed the dishes over again. When they arrived, she feigned surprise and said she feared he had gone mad, as there had never been anything but chicken Couscous. So the father and brothers took the law into their own hands and bound and beat him, and left. The wife ate her fill of the chicken *Couscous* in front of his very eyes.

Every day, she came to ask him "Chicken *Couscous* or plain *Couscous*?" and he answered "Plain Couscous." She would say "Then you're still not cured of this madness." To this question, he answered one day "Chicken *Couscous*." "There you are," she answered, "Now you are coming back to your senses. You must be fair and forswear always judging in favour of women, regardless of justice." She branded him on the forehead and untied him.

On the appointed day, the wronged husband returned. The qāḍi's wife told him to go and appeal against the qāḍi's decision. So the man came before the qadi and presented

his appeal. The qāḍi asked for the 'bitch' to be brought before him and flogged one hundred lashes. The qāḍi then asked her "Whose property are you claiming?" She explained tearfully "Sīdi, it's all his." The husband joyfully recovered his fortune and his wife was thrown into prison on the qadi's orders. From then on, the qāḍi judged impartially and never favoured women unfairly. He had learned his lesson!

THE CHIEF OF THE TRIBE'S DAUGHTER (S19)

This is a story that *Ummi al-Khīr* may her soul rest in peace, related to me .

Implore God's onness and he who has sinned impore his pardon.

It was commonplace among bedouin tribes to fight over cattle and property, and he who was stronger won. One day, a chief's house was invaded by his enemies, who killed him and looted and destroyed his household. Only his daughter managed to escape with her baby brother, with God's grace.

She walked and walked until she saw a light in the distance. She hastened towards it and found a friendly tribe. "My folk are all dead," she said "I am the only survivor, and this is my younger brother." "You are most welcome to stay with us, if it suits you, and become like one of my daughters," said the head of the family. "I am very grateful. May God bless you and your family," she replied. 'Aysha was taken to the women of the house and soon took her place among them. She would help the daughters in carding wool and spinning, and drawing water from the well. One day, as she went collecting wood, God guided her steps to a cauldron full of gold coins. Delighted by this gift from God, she hid it in her bundle of firewood and went back, saying nothing of her windfall to anyone. She dug a hole on a nearby hillside and hid it, thinking to give it to her brother when the time was ripe.

'Aysha's brother was now ten. She summoned him saying "If I gave you a hundred dinars, what would you do with it?" she asked. "I'd buy balloons for all the children of the neighbourhood," he answered. "He's still young and frivolous" she thought.

Five years later, she asked him the same question. "I'd buy some land and start a business" he replied. "He's beginning to understand life" she said to herself. The following day she told the people of the tribe "It's time for me to move on." Saddened, they all asked with one voice "We shall miss you." "My brother is now grown up," she explained, and "he must start to earn his living." The head of the household gave her his blessing and she left. That day they all wept and there was an air of sadness about the family.

She walked and walked and finally settled in a distant land. Soon she made friends with the neighbours and enquired whether there was any land for sale. One kind

neighbour directed her to a landowner who had a large estate to sell. She hastily went to see the man, bought the land and signed the papers.

'Aysha was now in possession of a large estate and her brother was well-known and respected in the neighbourhood as a merchant.

A few years later as 'Aysha was taking a walk, she came across a young girl as fair as the moon, but dressed in rags. "Who are you?" she approached her. "What guided your steps here?" "I am an orphan and have no-one but Almighty God." "Would you like to keep me company?" asked 'Aysha. "I live with my younger brother and there is a place for you in our generous home," said 'Aysha, thinking of the kind people who had taken her in. The girl was delighted and both women walked back as true sisters. When they arrived, 'Aysha washed and dressed her, and she became even more beautiful.

The newcomer was of marriageable age. 'Aysha thought of a match with her brother. She asked her "Why don't you two marry? I want you to attract my brother's attention." A word of praise from his sister, and a seductive glance from the young girl sufficed to make the brother propose. 'Aysha received the news with rejoicing and called the neighbours to prepare for the ceremony.

The marriage was celebrated with much show and the young couple settled happily together. A year later, a baby boy was born and he was named after his deceased grandfather. 'Aysha spoilt and pampered the baby.

As time passed, the new bride grew tired of her sister-in-law and jealous that her husband never did anything without consulting his sister. But 'Aysha continued with the same kindness of heart and generosity and the brother respected and loved her for it. Knowing there was no way out of it, the young wife sought the help of Azūzet es-Stūt. "I want to get rid of her, but my husband is very fond of her and won't hear a word against her." The old witch answered "I know just the thing for it." Then she gave her the egg of a water-snake and instructed her to give it to her sister-in-law to swallow whole, as a token of her love for her brother.

The following day, the young wife approached 'Aysha, saying "Do you say you love your brother?" "Indeed, I am ready to give my life for him." "Then swallow this egg whole if you do." 'Aysha answered "What's so difficult about swallowing this egg whole for my dear brother's sake?" And she swallowed it.

A month later 'Aysha felt something strange in her belly. Day after day her belly grew bigger. She started to worry, but in the meantime her sister-in-law started to draw her husband's attention to his sister's belly. "I have something awful to tell you. Your sister is pregnant" she came and said one day. "Do not be angry with her." The brother didn't want to hear anything about it. If you don't want to believe me, put your head on her belly when she sits in the sun and you will soon feel the baby moving."

The following day her brother watched 'Aysha waddling along and sitting down in the sun. He went up to her and hugged her, pretending to be affectionate. He then put his head on her belly and felt something moving. "It must be true," he thought. "What am I going to do? What a disgrace! Now that I have become well-known among my fellow merchants..." He went back in with a heavy heart. He was fond of his sister and the idea of killing her to wipe out the shame was repugnant to him. He thought of another idea.

"I am thinking of buying a new estate. Why don't you come along to see it?" "You go on your own. I feel too tired to walk," 'Aysha replied. "You know I can do nothing without your precious advice" he said. "Then we should take the money with us, in case we like it" 'Aysha said.

The following day they set off early in the morning, taking a waterskin with them. The journey was long and tiring and it was scorching hot. 'Aysha stopped now and then to rest and swallow a drop of water. "How much further is it?" she asked. "We'll soon be there," her brother reassured her. It was sunset when her brother finally said "We're there." By then 'Aysha was exhausted and asked to rest, but soon she sank into a deep sleep. Her brother emptied the waterskin in the sand, covered her with his *barnūs*, mounted his horse and set off.

It was morning before 'Aysha awoke to the scorching sun, and found herself alone. She realised what had happened. "She invoked God, saying "O God, who created me, do not abandon me." She cried and wailed, realising that her brother had eventually found out about her pregnancy.

'Aysha rose to her feet and appealed to God to guide her steps to a shelter. She walked until early afternoon and then sat down to rest. Tired and weary, she covered herself with her brother's burnus and sank again into a deep sleep. A while later a horseman was passing by and noticed the *barnūs* flapping in the wind. He dismounted and

uncovered the sleeping woman. He carried her to his horse and rode off to his estate nearby. When 'Aysha came to, he asked her "Tell me your story. What brought you here?" "My brother," she said, "driven by his wife. I don't understand what is happening to me."

The young man took leave of her, went to see an elderly man and reported what had happened. "She is enchanted. She must have swallowed a water-snake's egg," he explained. "And I can undo the spell for her. Bring me two lamb's lungs, and bring her to me." The man did as he was told. The old man put the two lungs on to fry. The smell of the fat would drive the snake out of the woman's belly, he said. As he did so, the woman groaned in pain and the snake appeared. The woman was aghast at what she saw, but finally relieved. The snake was embalmed, just like a human corpse. Aisha nailed the snake on a wooden board and asked the old man to write the following line on it: "A catastrophe from a most beloved sister." (Because she loved and spoiled her and married her to her brother, she was paid back in this way).

After she had rested she asked to leave. The young man proposed to her "Will you marry me?" 'Aysha answered "Aren't I too old for you?" "You are still young, and will live years and years. Leave it to God to punish them for their deeds." They married, and he did his best to spoil her, to make up for the hardship she had endured. She gave him two children.

Now her brother had left some money with her when he abandoned her. Having known thirst, 'Aysha decided to build a well with it. "I want to build a well for thirsty travellers." Her wish was fulfilled and a well was built near her estate.

Let's now come back to 'Aysha's brother, who after he abandoned her came back home with a heavy heart, and nothing was ever the same again. He looked for the money that 'Aysha must have hidden, but could find no trace of it. Soon, they became poor and wretched, and his wife made his life hell. One day, he left her. He walked and walked until he came near the well. He stopped to drink and refresh himself. 'Aysha saw him and soon recognised him. Her heart filled with longing and she made a move to speak to him, then refrained. She called her eldest son and asked him to go and invite the man to join them for lunch. "You shall be our guest" the young boy said to him. The man was taken to the house. 'Aysha mentioned nothing to her husband about recognising her brother. They ate and had tea, and the man thanked them and made to leave, but 'Aysha intervened and said "Where are you heading on this

scorching afternoon? You should stay overnight and set off early tomorrow morning." The man thanked her for her hospitality and accepted the invitation.

'Aysha cooked dinner that night and instructed her eldest son to ask her to entertain them by telling stories, and to insist she did so. After dinner, the son begged his mother "Please, mother, tell us a story." She said: "What do you want me to tell you?" "A story, anything" he said. She replied "Then I'll tell you the story of the Cares of my Heart."

The woman related her story from the very beginning to the end; how she ran away with her little brother, devoted her life to bringing him up, and so on and so forth. When she came to the part about the water-skin and how her brother abandoned her in the middle of nowhere, her brother shouted "My sister!" and clasped her to his breast. "Forgive me, sister! I sinned against you." They both cried bitterly, then he told her that it was all his wife's fault, the bitch. Her husband sympathised with him and asked him to stay. But his sister advised him not to abandon his wife and children. The brother made up his mind to kill her or divorce her, and bring his children to live with his sister. They gave him a horse and he set off. When he arrived at his orchard he was met by his little children, crying and wailing. "What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Mother is dead!" they sobbed. "Thank God!" he thought to himself. "She was struck down by the Hand of God rather than mine."

He retrieved the money that his sister had hidden and bought a piece of land near hers, took his children and settled there.

There we left them, and never heard from them again.

THE SPARKLING MAIDEN (S20)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is well ordered.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!".

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upn a time

Once upon a time there was a rich merchant who had two sons. They all worked in the father's silk business in *Sūq al-Wusta*. One day, the town crier announced that it was the season for the pilgrimage to Mecca. The old merchant's heart longed to make the pilgrimage, so he called his two sons, who were both married, and whose wives had conceived on the same day. He informed them that he was going to Mecca, and told them to take charge of the business.

He set off on pilgrimage. *In those days, it took a whole year.* In the meantime, the sons's wives conceived. Three months of craving, three months of fleshig out, and three months of skin tautening on the bones. One evening the two women gave birth to two little girls, one dark and ugly and the other fair and as beautiful as the moon. Three days after the grandfather returned from Mecca, he was presented with the two baby girls to choose names for them. On seeing the beauty of the fair one, he praised God and called her *Sharqat wa Dhawāt*, 'The one who shines bright'. Looking at the other one, he called her *Za'frāna*, 'Saffron'.

Fate caught up with the old man and he fell ill. On his death-bed, he called his elder son and asked him to look after his younger brother, and keep his shop stocked for him. With that, the old man died.

The elder son kept his promise to look after his brother and make sure he always had stock to sell. But his wife objected, saying "He must now stand on his own two feet." The husband replied "But I promised my father I would supply him with goods to sell." The wife eventually persuaded her husband to stop helping his brother.

The younger brother sold all his stock and was not able to replenish it. So he started selling his own property. Little by little, it all went; the shop, the land, the house, the furniture. The elder brother bought it all. Each has received his God's allotted *qasm*, 'share'. One day he came and said "You have no right to this house any more; it all belongs to me. There is a small dilapidated house nearby; why don't you go and live there?"

So the younger brother took his wife and his daughter and left. They moved into the miserable house and led a very modest existence there, looking after their daughter Sharqat.

The two girls, Za'frāna and Sharqat, turned fifteen and were put into the care of a *m'allma* to teach them domestic arts. Za'frāna was spoilt and her meals were always brought to her by a black slave, whereas Sharqat had to carry her own lunch with her. The *m'allma* was fond of Sharqat because she was modest and shy and never spoke loudly. She would spoil her with cakes and candy. One day, Sharqat came to the *m'allma*, saying "I had a dream last night." The *m'allma* replied "A good one, God willing." Sharqat answered "I had a vision that one day, as I was sitting, someone brought an ivory ship with golden oars, saying it was for the daughter of the poor and needy merchant." The *m'allma* replied "It's a gift from God."

Za'frāna went back home crying, and told her mother to ask her cousin Sharqat if she could buy her dream. Sharqat's uncle had never taken any further interest in his brother's affairs since he bought him up. His wife told him "Go and ask Sharqat if she could sell her dream. After all, they are poor and will be glad of whatever we care to give them. A hundred dinars will keep them happy." The husband replied "How can I go and ask for such a thing when I haven't even enquired after them for years?" The wife eventually talked him into it. So he went to visit his brother and his family. They gave him a warm welcome and he eventually brought up the object of his visit. Sharqat refused. Her uncle said "What if I gave you a hundred dinars?" She replied "The answer is still no. I will not sell my dream." "Five hundred, then," he said. She said "No." He offered to leave her half his fortune in his will. This time she accepted. The notaries were called and drew up the will. Thus, Sharqat sold her dream.

Now, the prince, son of the king of the Maghreb, arrived in the country by sea and said he would not disembark unless Sharqat, whom he had seen in a dream, came to meet him. Her uncle hurried to see her and ask her to go and meet the prince in place of his daughter. But she refused, saying "I have sold the dream to your daughter. She must go and meet him." He replied "How can I send him a dark, ugly girl? He would be put off." She answered "It's nothing to do with me any more." He begged "I will leave you the rest of my fortune as well, if you will only do it." She answered "Agreed" and the notaries were called to amend the will.

Sharqat's father was overjoyed to recover his fortune. A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She had a beautiful dress made and went to meet the prince. The prince said he would offer the ivory ship with the golden oars to Sharqat, if she would wait on him at dinner. The uncle hurried to his brother's house begging Sharqat to come and wait on their guest the prince. She replied "Why don't you ask your own daughter?"

He answered "But he has already seen you. I am prepared to leave you half the ship if you will go." She said "Agreed". So the notaries were called back again and drew up a new will. Sharqat went to her uncle's house dressed as a queen and waited on the prince, who offered her his royal armlet with the marriage contract inscribed on it.

The prince asked to see Sharqat before the wedding took place. The uncle hurried to his brother's house and begged Sharqat to come and stand in for his daughter again. She said she would do it on condition he left her the other half of the ship as well. They agreed, the notaries were summoned and the new will was written out. This time, the prince offered his ring and expressed his wish to attend Sharqat's *qassân ad-Dlal*, *when according to Beldi tradition, her hair would be cut for the first time to signify the end of her spoiling by her parents.* In Fact her hair had never been seen as traditin had it that a girl at puberty sould bind her hair in an 'Oksa and never show it to her kinsmen. *When I was young I remember being slapped by my mother just because I ventured to cut a fringe which was a fashion at that time. They used to be tough with us .* Anyway the following day, Sharqat sat in the middle of a chanting crowd of women, and her hair was cut. The prince took a lock of her hair and left. Za'frâna was also undergoing the same ceremony, but in private.

On the wedding-day, Sharqat and Za'frâna were dressed identically in dresses and jewellery provided by the bridegroom. The carriages came for them and they set off. Now, the uncle's wife had prepared very salty lamb cutlets for Sharqat's lunch. So on the way to her bridegroom's house, she felt very thirsty, but her uncle's wife, who

was accompanying her, refused to give her any water. The journey was long and tiring and it was hot, which made her even thirstier. The uncle's wife said she would let her have some water on condition she would blind her in one eye. Sharqat was so thirsty that she agreed, but her aunt only gave her a drop of water, saying she could have more if she would let her blind the other eye. Thus Sharqat lost the sight of both eyes. A few miles further on, Sharqat asked her to stop the carriage to let her relieve herself. As she got out, in all her finery, her aunt told the coachman to drive on, and she was left behind.

The coach arrived at the prince's palace, which was all lit up and decorated for the festivities. Now the prince had been adopted by his aunt, who was in charge of the whole event, and very impatient to see his bride, who was said to be exceptionally fair. Za'frāna was now taken to the bridal chamber, completely veiled, as was the tradition, to meet her groom. When he came and lifted the veil, to his disappointment he discovered a dark, ugly girl. "Are you Sharqat?" he exclaimed. "Indeed I am" she answered, and it is your country's climate which has transformed me". Saddened, the prince went out and asked the musicians to stop drumming. He went to his chest and took out the lock of hair he had taken from Sharqat's *Qassān ad-Dlal*, but found no similarity at all with the girl he had just seen. Disappointed, he remained silent. His aunt went to see the bride and was shocked: "Has he given up his fortune for a woman like this? But such is his choice: I must accept it."

Meanwhile, Sharqat heard hooves passing along the road and called out "Help!" The donkey's rider turned to discover a beautiful girl dressed as a bride, blindly feeling her way. He asked her "Whatever has happened to you, my poor girl?" She related what had happened. He was moved by her story and offered to take her home to his wife. When they arrived at his wretched hovel in the prince's town, they were met by his wife. She took pity on her when she heard the story and offered to shelter her. On finding how poor the childless old couple were, Sharqat offered to sell her bracelet, which had been given to her by the prince. The man took it to the suq to sell. No-one could afford such an opulent piece of jewellery except the prince, for his new bride. So the bracelet was brought to the court where the prince sat in judgement on affairs of state. When he saw the bracelet he was astonished. "This is the twin of the bracelet I gave to Sharqat! This is a mystery." So he said nothing, but bought it.

The poor man took the money back home to Sharqat, who gave him half of it to renovate the house and buy provisions. She spent some time living with the couple, but eventually grew bored. So she gave him her earrings to sell and asked him to buy

her an orchard and two black slaves to keep her company. The man took them to the suq to sell. Who could afford such priceless things but the prince? When he saw them, he was astonished and exclaimed "These are identical to the earrings I gave to Sharqat! I must unravel this mystery."

Sharqat now lived in her orchard with the two black slaves, whose marriage she had arranged. Each and every day, she would stroll around her estate, then rest under an olive-tree. The slave couple could understand the language of the animals, and one day they overheard two birds talking. "You bird of the sea, do you have any news for the bird of the earth?" The female answered "I have no news, but I stole a sultana from a street-barrow and they hit me on the beak." The other bird retorted "Damn your greed! You only talk about your stomach. Tell me about the fair young maiden who was blinded by her aunt, instead." The female answered "I have a cure for her. She needs an olive-leaf chewed with a drop of blood from each of our claws and placed on her eyes to recover her sight. But she must not forget to heal our wounded claws with the chewed leaf as well."

As soon as they heard this, the black couple caught the two birds, cut them on the claws, took an olive leaf and chewed it up with the birds' blood. Then they placed the paste on the eyes of their mistress, who quickly recovered her sight. She was overjoyed to see the world again. The old couple and a notary were called to witness her signing over her property to her slaves. Talking to the old man, she said "I haven't forgotten you, but be patient." She asked him to go to the gold *sūq* and select a fine Jewish or Italian jeweller, and bring him home to her. When he arrived, she told him "I want you to make me a replica of a gazelle, big enough to hide inside. The eyes must be made of emerald, and do not spare the cost."

The jeweller went back to the suq and worked day and night for a whole week on the task. Finally the gazelle was ready. He took it to her and was paid generously for his work. Sharqat hid inside the gazelle and asked the old man to take it to the suq, and sell it for its weight in gold. Who could afford such a priceless objet d'art, except the prince?

The prince bought this exquisite object and put it in his bedroom to admire. In the evening, through the eyes of the gazelle, Sharqat saw her cousin Za'frāna come in alone, undress and slip into bed. Later on, a slave girl brought the prince's dinner on a tray and left it on the table for his return. Sharqat left her hiding-place and ate her fill from the prince's dinner. Then she went back. When the prince came in, to his dismay

he found his dinner disturbed. So he went to see his aunt and enquired "Who served my dinner?" "Your slave-girl" answered his aunt. He complained "It wasn't properly done." She answered "Don't worry, tomorrow I'll do it myself." On the next occasion the prince came to have his dinner he found it disturbed again. So he decided to get to the bottom of the mystery himself.

The next evening, the prince came back early and hid behind the curtains before his dinner was brought. As usual, Za'frāna came into the room, undressed and slipped into bed. Sharqat came out of her hiding-place and made her way to the dinner-table. She had not even taken the first mouthful when the prince came out, saying "Do you need company?" When he saw her face, the prince recognised her immediately and asked her to tell him her story. She related the whole story about her aunt's misdeeds and the old couple's generosity. He promised to take his revenge. Sharqat soon regained her rightful place in the palace, whereas Za'frāna was suspended from the chandelier as a punishment.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The prince introduced her to his aunt, explaining "This is the woman I really gave up my fortune for, not the other one. I knew there was a mystery, and I have been through it all with patience." When Sharqat's aunt saw her niece again, she went pale. The prince asked Sharqat what kind of punishment she wanted to give her. "I want four she-camels to tear her limb from limb. As for my cousin, I want her to be walled up in a sewer and left to die."

The prince and Sharqat started their marriage anew. Her father and uncle were summoned to attend the celebrations. Seven days na seven nigts when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except at he sultan's house. Sharqat arranged for the poor old couple who had taken her in to come and live with her in a wing of the palace.

And they all lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

THE SALT PEDDLER (S21)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time, there was a childless king who always yearned for a child. He prayed to God night and day. One night an angel appeared in his dream, asking him "Would you rather have a daughter with a misfortune who will survive, or a son with a misfortune who will die? He answered "God forbid!" The angel replied "I am a messenger sent to you by God" He answered "A daughter, then." His wife conceived the following month. Three months of craving, three months of fleshing out and three months of skin tautening on bone. A baby daughter as beautiful as the moon, praise to the creator who created her with such a beauty was born. She was put into the good care of a nurse, then a nanny. The child crawled, toddled, held to the wall and walked. In real life a child grows in a year or two, but in a couple of words in a tale. A governess taught her handicrafts and to read and write. When she turned sixteen, she was learned in the arts and handicrafts. One day, as she was sitting peacefully embroidering, a bird flew down and started to annoy her by scattering the sequins on her embroidery hoop. She tried to shoo him away, then slipped off her anklet and hit him with it. He picked it up, flew away and headed for a distant castle. As he arrived, he took off his bird skin, changed into human form and commanded: "All of you weep with me over the one who hit me with her anklet. O! castle, weep, O! fish in the depths of the sea, listen." The castle and the fish wept with him. All three wept bitterly.

Two or three days later, the bird went back to the scene. The princess was sitting at her embroidery as usual. He started to tease her, and she hit him with her bracelet. He

picked it up and flew off with it to his castle. As he arrived he turned into a man and commanded the castle as before. "Weep with me over the one who hit me with her anklet. Weep with me over the one who hit me with her bracelet. O! castle, weep with me and you, fish in the depths of the sea, listen." All three wept bitterly.

On the third occasion, when the bird teased the princess, she hit him with her earring. This time, she wept so much that she fell ill. Her face turned as pale as straw and she slept in sick bed. All the court's physicians were summoned to cure her, but they all said that she was suffering neither from fever nor from sweating, but from melancholy. All the storytellers were called to entertain her to no avail.

An old bedouin woman in a distant village lost her chicken. She looked for it for three days without success. One evening the chicken mistook the moon for daytime and came out of hiding. The old lady was staying up late. She gave the chicken some corn, and followed it to its hiding-place near the river. As they came up, she saw the water part and a camel emerged loaded with plates, pots and pans. Amazed, the old lady watched as the camel flopped down and the pots and pans washed themselves in the river, loaded themselves back into the panniers, and the camel made his way back into the water. The old woman caught hold of his tail and followed him. They came to a palace. She hid in the entrance hall, and watched as the pots and pans put themselves away. The table set itself with plates, knives and forks. A king and queen sat down to dine. The bird arrived a few minutes later, took off his bird-skin and turned into a human. He took out the princess' anklet, bracelet and earring and started to weep, commanding: O! castle weep with me over the one who hit me with her anklet, O! castle weep with me over the one who hit me with her bracelet, O! castle weep with me over the one who hit me with her earring, O! castle weep ! O! fish in the depth of the sea listen! After dinner, the pots and pans, knives and forks, gathered in a basket and loaded themselves onto the camel which made its way again out of the palace. As he left, the old woman followed him down to the river. On hearing of the princess' illness, she decided to recount her extraordinary experience to her. She obtained permission to visit the princess and told her the true story.

After hearing it, the princess exclaimed "That's exactly who I'm looking for! Take me to him." The old woman expressed her concern about the risky enterprise, but the princess insisted, and decided to run away that very night with the old woman's help. She tied her bedsheets together and climbed down from her window. The old lady led her to the river and left her. When the camel appeared with the pots and pans to wash, she followed him all the way to the palace and hid in the hallway. She saw what the

old woman had seen, then she saw the prince appear, take off his bird-skin and command:" O! castle weep wiht me over the one who hit me with her anklet, O! castle weep with me over the one who hit me with her bracelet, O! castle weep with me over the one who hit me with her earring,O! castle weep ! O! fish in the depth of the sea listen! To his amazement, all started to laugh. The prince angrily enquired "How dare you laugh while I am crying?" They answered "The one you are crying over is among us." He asked "Where?" They answered "In the cupboard." He went over to her and said "My dear, I've cried my eyes out over you." She replied "I have, too." They sat and talked happily for a while, then he asked her "When my parents the king and queen come, ask for their forgiveness in the name of God." She did so, and they were overjoyed to see her. They explained that they were not human, but *djins*, and their son had been put under a spell which they hoped she could break. They lived happily together until one day he went to his father and anounced that he wanted to marry her. His father objected, on the grounds that he was promised to his cousin. *This is like my story, they separated us damn the bastards!* The lovers were disappointed and decided to elope. They travelled emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filld except bu our dear almighty God, . . . until they were exhausted. They decided to stop for a while. She laid her head in his lap and fell sound asleep. When she awoke, she found a stone under her head for a pillow, and the prince was nowhere to be seen. *You see, one can never trust men. Sometimes they are mere puppets in their fathers' hands.. May be we will have some justice in the world to come, but even God seems to favour men. He promised them Hūris, 'angels' and there is no mention of male Hūris for women.* She took to the road again, until she met with a shepherd. She suggested that they exchange clothes. The shepherd was more than happy to do so, as her clothes were far finer than his. She changed into the shepherd's clothes and wrapped his scarf around her face. She continued on her way until she reached the king's city, which was all lit up and decorated. She met with a salt-peddler. *In those days, salt was carried on donkey-back,* and asked him what the festivities were for. He replied "Today is the prince's wedding day, and I am to carry this salt to his palace." She asked "Can I possibly go in your place?" And she gave him a purse of gold. He readily agreed, and she led the donkey with the salt to the palace. As she arrived, the prince called ou to her "Mallāh, have you seen the beautiful maiden?" She answered, "Yes, I have seen an extraordinarily beautiful maiden wearing one golden anklet, looking for her lost love who left without goodbye." When he heard that, the prince continued to ask the same question and got the same answer again and again. On the wedding-day, to everyone's surprise, the prince asked to go to the bridal-chamber accompanied by the salt-peddler. The salt-peddler asked to have his donkey with him. They went in. The prince again asked "Mallāh, have you seen the

beautiful maiden "Mallāh, have you seen the beautiful maiden?" She answered, "Yes, I have seen an extraordinarily beautiful maiden wearing one golden anklet, looking for her lost love who left without goodbye. On hearing the answer he went to bed. When he fell asleep, the princess crept out of the room to the garden and hanged herself. When the prince woke up, he called out for Mallāh, but he didn't answer. He went out to look for him. To his sorrow, he found his beloved princess hanging from a tree. He wept bitterly over her and hanged himself next to her.

In the morning, his bride woke to find him gone. She went out to look for him and discovered them both, hanging side by side. She pushed them apart and hanged herself between them.

The king, the queen and his entourage woke up to the servants' cries coming from the garden. The king and queen mourned their son. Time passed, and a jasmine-plant and a honeysuckle grew out of their graves, separated by a thistle. One afternoon, as the king was sitting in his garden, enjoying the cool breeze, he heard "O jasmine, O honeysuckle, what is this thistle doing between us?" "The jasmine answered "Amighty God willed it so, *Hukm Allāh*. In life we could not be united, and in the hereafter we were kept apart." When the king heard this, he pulled up the thistle. And whenever there was a breeze, the jasmine and honeysuckle tenderly intertwined.

There we left them and we have never seen them since

THE FRIVOLOUS (Tale S22)

Once upon a time there was a merchant who was married and had two daughters. Fate caught up with his wife and she died. The merchant was left to look after his daughters alone. He would go out in the morning to work and come back in the afternoon. A kindly neighbour offered to come and wash and dress the children every day while he was out. The girls grew up lacking *hishma*, modesty, *tarbiyya*, good education and manners. Even when they reached fifteen, (their mother being in the grave) the girls would still play around riding on each other's shoulders, shouting at the top of their voices, lacking a mother's guiding hand. Their father tried to discipline them, but to no avail.

A fellow-merchant had two sons of marriageable age, so he went one day to his friend and suggested they should arrange a marriage between their children. The girl's father welcomed the idea and they came to an agreement. The neighbour was called again to prepare the brides' trousseaux. The girls themselves were unable to help, never having been taught the domestic arts. On the wedding-day she dressed them and did their make-up. A carriage was sent to bring the girls to their bridegrooms' house. When they arrived, the eldest daughter asked her husband to carry her on his back. He was shocked, and scolded her. The younger sister did the same, but her husband picked her up and carried her around the courtyard. The mother-in-law was scandalised at this, but said "They are still young; I'll teach them how to behave."

On the seventh day after the marriage, she took them to the Turkish baths. Seeing her use a depilatory, they enquired what it was. The mother-in-law said "It's like a garment you put on all over!" She washed them and dressed them, and took them back home. The following day, while the men of the house were out, the two girls decided to try it out for themselves. They undressed, smeared the cream all over their bodies, and started playing around bare, shouting and carrying each other on their shoulders. Suddenly, their father-in-law came back unexpectedly and was shocked at what he saw. He hurriedly entered his room muttering: "If you do not feel ashamed you can do what you want, there is no more shame and respect in this house." The two young husbands were summoned to discipline their wives. The eldest slapped his wife and dragged her inside their room. The younger tried to do the same, but his wife would not submit to it.

The mother-in-law tried hard to teach them modesty, submission and decorum. The elder was amenable to instruction and soon learnt her lesson. The younger wouldn't, and so she was repudiated and sent back in shame to her father's house.

THE WICKED MOTHER-IN-LAW (S23)

Once upon a time there was a young merchant who married a girl from a respectable Beldi family chosen by his mother. *In olden times the in-laws were very powerful, and girls were expected to behave modestly. Mothers-in-laws took control of the household.*

This merchant had two sisters who were very spoiled. The newly wed daughter-in-law was treated like a maid and given the dirtiest tasks, sweeping and cleaning the floor. But she always kissed her hand and called her *Lilla*, 'mistress'. The mother-in-law had the key to the store room. When dinner was ready the mother-in-law would serve the food the men first then the women. The women would sit to eat and look for any excuse to send the bride on errands: bring the salt, we forgot the water etc.. While they ate their fill, the poor daughter-in-law remained hungry but never complained about her mistreatment. Beldi custom prevented her from speaking out.

The girl grew thinner every day, but she was the daughter of a respectable family which considers it most important for a girl not to show arrogance or disrespect towards her elders. The young husband saw that his wife was pale and subdued. One day he smuggled some cakes to his wife and fed her. But his mother discovered it and accused him of being henpecked. The bride grew thinner, fell sick and died.

The young merchant got married for the second time and his new bride after a few months joined the second to the grave. The third newly wed bride, after a few months grew thinner. The young husband noticed it and this time reported it to an old fellow-merchant and complained about his mother and sisters treatment.

The old man advised the young merchant how he would teach his family a lesson. He asked him to feign an argument with his wife and repudiate her and take his effeminate apprentice who would stand as the new wife.

The young merchant pretended to have an argument with his wife and repudiated her. A week later, his mother suggested she should find him another wife. The young man said this time he would make the choice himself.

The first day the 'new bride came to the house, she took charge of the kitchen. She would pick up the best of the food and eat while the others watched. When they sat down to eat, she found any excuse to send her mother and sisters-in-law in turn to run errands.

One day the, the women decided to go to the Turkish baths and asked the daughter-in-law to prepare some nice *mhammas* soup for their return. After they left, the daughter-in-law took a big jar of grain and emptied in a huge cauldron, added tomatoes and water and put it on fire. When the women came back from the baths, they were outraged to discover she had used the whole year's provision of *mhammas*. Shocked, they begged the young man to repudiate the horrible girl and take back his former wife, and they would gladly serve her. So his former wife came back and regained her rightful position and the two women were given their lesson.

THE DONKEY'S HEAD (S25)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time there was a poor old woman who lived alone in a wretched hovel. One day, as she was cooking, a donkey's head rolled to rest at her feet. The sight of it didn't frighten her; on the contrary, she invited him to share her soup. He accepted, and sat down to eat. When he left, the woman discovered a purse of gold. She was thrilled at this windfall. The following day she went to the grocer's and bought two bags full of provisions, and came back home to enjoy a sumptuous meal, for once. No sooner had she taken the first mouthful than the donkey's head appeared again. She invited him to share her meal. He accepted, and when he left the old woman discovered another purse of gold.

Every day at sunset, the donkey's head would appear, share her meal and depart, leaving behind a purse of gold. By now, the old woman had made a large silk cushion for the donkey's head to sit on. She gradually became rich and started to change her lifestyle. She bought a new house and furniture and settled in with the donkey's head.

One day, he told her "I want you to go and ask for the sultan's daughter's hand." Surprised, the woman asked "The sultan's daughter's hand? Who am I going to ask it for? They will kill me! Please don't put me in such an embarrassing situation." The donkey's head persisted "I have been good to you. You should do me this favour in return." The old woman remembered his generosity and agreed. The donkey's head

said to her "Tomorrow a carriage will come to take you to the sultan's palace. I will also provide fine clothes for you."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed, in the afternoon, a carriage of astonishing splendour, encrusted with pearls and jewels took the old woman to the sultan's palace. Seeing the sumptuous carriage, people exclaimed "Just look at that carriage! Have you ever seen anything like it? Who can it be?" When the old woman made her appearance, everyone ran to give her a warm welcome. "I have come to seek kinship with your honourable family," she told the sultan. "Who for, he enquired. "For my son, the donkey's head" she replied. "Surely you have come to make fun of us," and he ordered his footmen to spank her, and then put her out. The carriage was waiting and took her back to her house. She came in exhausted and complained to her son, who was waiting to comfort her after her ordeal.

A few weeks later, he asked her again "I want you to go and ask for the sultan's daughter's hand." "They will kill me this time," she answered. "Tell them to name their price, and I will fulfill their every wish." The old woman objected at first, but eventually gave in. The same carriage took her to the palace. Seeing her arrive, the Queen's maid ran to her mistress, saying "That woman is back again." "Let us have some fun with her," said the Queen, and sent for her. The old woman said "I have come to ask for your daughter's hand; just name your price." The Queen replied "I want a hundred jewel-cases, full of silver jewellery." The daughter said "I want a hundred jewel-cases full of gold jewellery, pearls and emeralds." Even the maid said "I want a hundred slaves, carrying baskets full of silks and cosmetics, accompanied by the Pasha's orchestra," and they all laughed heartily. The old woman replied "It shall all be yours. "When do you want the wedding to be?" "Next Thursday," the Queen answered jokingly.

The old woman went back home, telling the donkey's head what they had demanded: "a hundred cases of silver jewellery, a hundred cases of gold jewellery with pearls and emeralds, and a hundred slaves carrying baskets of silk and cosmetics and accompanied by the Pasha's orchestra. "Is that all they want?" asked the donkey's head.

The following Thursday, as the Queen was on her balcony, she saw and heard a procession of a hundred black slaves carrying baskets on their heads and maids holding jewel-boxes, accompanied by drums and pipes. "So the woman was serious!" she told the Sultan. "I will give her to him," he answered. So they came to an agreement with the donkey's head that he would not show himself in public, and the order was given to

celebrate the wedding, seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. A sumptuous new palace for the couple appeared overnight.

At midnight sharp on the wedding-day, the donkey's head appeared in the bridal chamber through a tunnel leading from his home. He had got rid of his donkey's skin and changed into a handsome prince in a fine silk barnūs, 'cloak'. He kissed her on the forehead, saying "May you be my wife in life and the hereafter. I am under a spell; may you be patient until it is broken. Keep it secret." The couple spent seven nights and seven days in marital bliss. He would appear every night at midnight from the tunnel.

Time passed, and the vizier's daughter became curious as to why the princess had not left her strange husband, the donkey's head. So she asked to pay her a visit, with the intention of unravelling the mystery. When she entered, there was no sign of the donkey's head, and the princess was happy and contented. At nightfall, she pretended to be taken ill, so the princess invited her to stay in her apartment for the night. Now there was an inner room where the prince used to divest himself of his donkey's skin. The vizier's daughter, after pretending to retire to sleep, slipped into this room to watch. At midnight, she saw the donkey's head appear and change into a handsome prince, before joining the princess in her chamber. The vizier's daughter thought to herself "What does he need this skin for, if he's so handsome? I will get rid of it." When she was sure that everyone was sleeping, she took the skin and threw it into the fire. No sooner had it started to burn, than the prince spoke to his wife, saying "I have been betrayed!" and he vanished.

The vizier's daughter, sensing the danger, set off early in the morning. The princess woke up to find everything gone, including her husband: no palace, no bed, no slaves. She wept and wailed and went to her father's palace. He welcomed her and tried to comfort her but she could not be solaced, and decided to go and visit the old woman. She recounted what had happened, and the old woman asked her to stay with her.

A few weeks later, they were visited by a bedouin from the old woman's village, who in the course of conversation mentioned that she had witnessed something extraordinary. "I have something incredible to tell you." The two women enquired "What is it?" She began "One day, as I was sitting by the river-bank, I saw the water part and there came out of it a camel loaded with crockery and utensils. The crockery seemed to wash itself and then load itself onto the camel. I seized the camel's tail and

held on, following it through the water. We arrived at a palace at the bottom of the sea. I went in and hid in a cupboard. Soon, a king and queen wearing crowns appeared followed by a fine handsome young man, carried on a palanquin, with half of his face burned. They all sat down to eat. The king said 'Now, what will be her fate? Look what she has done to your face. Shall we burn her?' He answered 'It isn't her fault. It's the vizier's daughter's, and even she didn't mean any harm.' The queen said 'She shall be burned.' The prince answered 'I beg you, no!' With that, they all retired and I followed the camel back." The princess eagerly asked "Can you take me there?" The bedouin answered "I will take you to the river, but I will not accompany you any further."

Meanwhile, the prince was carefully nursed by his mother and he gradually learned to walk unaided again. One day, the princess went and waited for the camel to appear. When it did so, she caught hold of his tail and followed him into the depths. She hid in a cupboard to eavesdrop. Soon the king and queen appeared, followed by the prince on crutches. They sat down to eat and started their ritual argument. "She shall be burned" the king said. "I beg, you, no!" the prince replied. "She shall be grilled," the queen said. "It's not her fault," the prince replied. "I beg you not to." And he went to walk about the palace.

The princess came out of her hiding place, fell at his feet and begged him: "I didn't betray you. Come back to me." The prince was surprised to see her, and told her "Go and stay with the old woman. I will have a tunnel built from here to her house. Help me to recover, then go and see my mother and beseech her help in the name of God. That way, we will soon be re-united."

When she returned to her own world she found the palace restored to normality, bustling with activity. She resumed her life as if nothing had happened. Under a marble slab in the floor she found the promised tunnel and would go through it every day to the prince's underwater palace to nurse him. When he improved, she surprised the king and queen as they sat at dinner, saying "I have come to beseech your help in the name of God; the Prophet himself granted such a favour. Give me back my husband." They took pity on her and said "He will return to you when his spell is broken. Go back to your palace, and continue to visit him from time to time, until he is completely recovered."

Each day the princess would go through the secret tunnel to join the prince, nurse and entertain him, until he was able to come and visit her himself through the tunnel. On

the day he felt himself to be completely recovered, he came to her and said "Today I am here, and I will stay, because my spell is broken." He washed and dressed in his best finery, and went to see the king, his father-in-law. He was delighted to find that the donkey's head turned out to be the son of a king, higher in rank than himself. The wedding celebrations started anew, seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except at the sultan's house. The vizier's daughter was forgiven, because she had meant him no harm.

And they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

WOMEN'S WILES (S26)

Once upon a time, as God is everywhere, our tent is made of silk and yours with linen, while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

My tale is one of wonder.

May our prayers and yours be offered up for the beloved Prophet, peace be upon him!

May the old witch Azūzet es-Stūt be damned!

She passes through the eye of a needle, saying "How large is the kingdom of God!"

She squeezes through the spout of a pitcher, saying "I can't bear such narrowness; may I never have to put up with it." She went out to buy some ghee and came back with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time, as God is all-knowing, there lived in Tunis a master merchant, who had put up a sign on his shop saying "Men's wiles are sixteen times more powerful than women's."

The daughter of *Amīn al-Tujjār*, 'the chief of guild', a highly educated girl, was passing by one day and saw the sign. It angered her, and she thought to herself "I will teach him a lesson."

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She went into the shop, greeted the merchant and burst out sobbing bitterly. The merchant was surprised and asked "What's the matter?" The girl only cried louder. He asked her "By God, what's your story?" She replied "Am I one-eyed?" He answered "One-eyed? I swear your eyes are more beautiful than a gazelle's." She continued "Am I bald?" letting her white veil fall from her hair. "Bald?" he queried. "Your hair is like silk, and so black that the night is jealous." "Am I lame?" she asked, lifting her skirt to show her fine white legs. By then the merchant was gaping and his mouth was watering. "Lame?" he echoed. "Your legs are straight and white as marble columns." She continued "I am the daughter of the king, and every time a suitor comes to ask for my hand, my father the king turns him down, saying "My daughter is one-eyed, bald and lame." "Does he really?" the merchant exclaimed. "Well then, I'll come tomorrow and ask for you hand." With that, the chief guilds's daughter left.

The master merchant spent a restless night dreaming about the beautiful girl. As soon as he saw the first streak of dawn of the new day he rose and went straight to the public baths. He washed, shaved, dressed smartly and went to the palace. The king was holding court. The merchant asked for an audience with the king. They said "Have you come to make a complaint?" He answered "Far from it." They told him to wait until after the court session to see the king.

When it was over, the master merchant was shown in to the king's presence. He greeted him with due deference and said "I have come seeking kinship with your honour." Surprised, the king replied "I have no daughter to marry off." "Indeed you have, my lord, and she is one-eyed, bald and lame." The king replied "Since you are prepared to accept that, then I will give her to you, on condition you give two million dinars as her bride-price." Hearing the two million dinars mentioned, the merchant wavered, then remembered the girl's beauty and answered "Gladly. Agreed." It was decided to celebrate the marriage the following Thursday. Seven days and seven nights where no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house.

On the wedding day the master merchant sent a carriage to the palace to fetch his bride, and waited impatiently for its return. When it arrived two slaves lifted out a huge basket covered with a white veil. "It must be her trousseau" he thought to himself, and waited for the bride to follow, but she didn't. He went into the bridal chamber to examine the contents of the basket while he waited for the bride. To his astonishment, when he lifted the veil he found the bride sitting in the middle of the basket. "Who are you?" he asked. A squeaky little voice replied "It's me, your bride!" He felt an immense weight of sadness descend on him, thinking to himself "I have been tricked." He spent a restless night and the following day he went to the *sūq*, opened his shop and sat inside, crushed by his misfortune.

Soon the chief of guild's daughter came in and greeted him. "Good morning. May all your days be unlucky!" "What have I done to you, to cause me such a calamity?" She said, pointing to the sign above "Do you really think men's wives are more powerful than women's? You must change the order of the words on your sign to 'Women's wives are sixteen times more powerful than men's' if you want me to get you out of this misfortune." So the merchant called a painter and changed the sign. She said "Tomorrow, hire a rowdy band and drummers and ask them to come and play in front of the palace. If the king enquires about them, say they are your folk who came to congratulate you on the occasion of your wedding."

The merchant chose the roughest, noisiest band he could find, tattooed and barefoot, and instructed them to go and play in front of the palace. The king was taking a nap, and awoke to the sound of a noisy crowd. "Who are they? What are they doing?" His son-in-law the master merchant answered "These are my folk, come to congratulate me on my marriage. Each region has its own traditions, and he who denies his roots is a dog. They are my own flesh and blood from Jlass." Outraged, the king exclaimed "Are you from Jläss, then?" "Indeed I am, and he who denies his roots is a dog." The king continued "Then we cannot be related in marriage. You must divorce her at once." The merchant answered sarcastically "It isn't that easy. I shall divorce her on condition you give me seven times the amount I paid you." Turning to his courtiers, the king shouted in disgust "Give him what he asks, and turn the pig out!"

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed, the master merchant opened his shop in high spirits, thinking to go and ask for the hand of the girl he now knew to be the chief of guild's daughter. In the afternoon, he put on his best *jibba* and *barnūs* and went to the chief of guild's house. After greeting the man and his company, he said "I have come to seek kinship with your honour." He replied "She's yours." The master merchant replied "I have one condition, though." Surprised, the father enquired what it was. "I would ask to see her first" he answered, saying to himself "He who has been tricked once, shall not be taken in again!" Outraged, the man exclaimed "See her! I have no daughter I will allow to be seen by a man!" The company intervened. "Why not? After all, she is not bald, one-eyed or lame!" The father persisted in refusing, but his companions said "This is the opportunity of a lifetime. You must let him."

The master merchant was eventually shown in to see the girl. When he saw her, he heaved a sigh of relief "Thank heavens!" he thought to himself, and said to the girl "Once bitten, twice shy!" They were married, the celebration took seven days and seven nights and they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

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while the enemy's tent is full of rats and mice.

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with the grocer's brain on a plate. She went to get a folded veil, and came back with it
walking beside her.

Listeners, may we all be guided to goodness and to make the Shehāda (declaration of
faith in Islam).

Once upon a time

Once upon a time there was a prince who went out in disguise to inquire about the welfare of his people. When he came to the market he found an old woman selling wool. He asked her:

"Who spins the wool for you?" She answered:

"My daughters, Ḥasna, Ḥussayna and Kāmilt al-Ḥusn God bless them. They spin the wool and I come to the market to sell it." He asked her:

"Would you give me the eldest Ḥasna in marriage?" She replied:

"Yes I will." He told her the marriage would be celebrated the following week. The next Friday he came to her house with two bags of provisions and the wedding dress, as was the tradition. She had the bride dressed and made up. He sent a carriage to take her to the palace. When the bride was shown to the bridal chamber, he came to greet her. When he tried to raise her veil he heard a voice saying:

"Don't touch her, O Muḥammed, son of the Sultan. She is not destined for you. She is destined for the dog with the seven chains." He dropped the veil, put her back in the carriage and sent her back to her mother. A few weeks later, the prince went out in disguise again and went to see the old lady to ask her for her second daughter's hand. They came to an agreement and a week later he sent a carriage for her. But when he again lifted the veil, he heard a voice saying:

"She is not destined for you. She is destined for the one swallowed up by the earth because of his exceptional beauty. He dropped the veil, and the same carriage which

brought her there took her back again to her mother's. A week later the prince went to see the old woman to ask for her youngest daughter's hand. This time she refused, on the grounds that her daughters were obviously not meant for him. When she went back home, she informed her youngest daughter kāmilt al-Ḥusn about the match and explained why she had refused. The youngest begged:

"Let me try. I might be the one for him." The following day her mother relented and agreed to give her to him. A week later, a carriage was sent to fetch the bride. When she was shown into the bridal chamber her tried to lift her veil and heard the voice saying:

"This is your destined bride. May you prosper and multiply." He kissed her on the forehead and said to her "May you be my destined wife, in this world and in the world to come." The marriage was consummated and they lived happily together.

A month passed and her sisters had heard no news from her. Curious, they insisted on going to visit her and enquire what had become of her. She was overjoyed to see them, and gave them a warm welcome. They asked for a favour from her:

"Could you ask your husband why he didn't accept us and married you instead?" She said she would, but that she would have to wait until he returned. When the mother told them it was time to leave, they insisted on staying the night to hear the answer the following morning. The mother refused, but the girls were adamant. *In those days, women were not allowed to meet men face to face.* When the husband came back and they went to bed, she asked him:

"Why did you refuse my other sisters and marry me?" He answered:

"Why bring that old story up now?" She insisted on having an answer. He explained that on the first two occasions when he wanted to marry one of the sisters he had heard a voice telling him that they were not for him. The first was destined for the dog with the seven chains and the second for the one who had been swallowed up by the earth because of his exceptional beauty.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed, the two sisters heard the husband leaving, they hurried to hear the answer. "What did he tell you?" She answered:

"He told me that each of you is destined for someone else; the eldest for the dog with the seven chains and the younger one for the man who was swallowed up by the earth because of his exceptional beauty." When the two sisters heard this, they exclaimed:

"So that's what it was! Now we must go out and search for our destined husbands."

She answered:

"You must be mad! It's too dangerous. They answered:

"If you really love us, you will give us provisions and help us."

They eventually talked her into it. She prepared some provisions for them and all their hearts' desires and bade them farewell.

The two girls took to the road. They walked and walked emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until they grew weary and dejected. When they came to a crossroads they said:

"It's pointless to continue like this together. We should take different roads. They embraced each other and said if they were destined to meet again they would, if not, there would be no ill-feeling between them.

They went their separate ways. The eldest Hasna, walked and walked emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until night fell and she grew tired. She saw a light at a distance and decided to head for it and seek shelter for the night. When she arrived she found a big house with seven identical rooms and a big bowl of *couscous*. As she was hungry she went in and helped herself. Around midnight, she heard a rumbling and felt the earth shake. She was frightened to death, rushed into one of the rooms and barred herself in. She was amazed to see a dog being dragged along by four guards, who could barely restrain his frenzy. They gave him the cuscus and he ate it all up, and drained the water bucket. With that, he collapsed, and the four guards left. When all was calm again, the dog shook off his chains and went around the house, saying:

"Whoever you are, come out of your hiding-place. If you are an old woman, I'll treat you like my mother, if you are an old man I'll treat you like my father, if you are a young woman I'll treat you like a sister or like a wife, or if you are a young boy I'll treat you like a brother. Come out; I swear by God that you will be safe." She came out and said;

"I have come all this way for you." He said;

"Then you will be my wife." He went on "I am really a prince but I am under a spell. I warn you not to approach me when I am in one of my fits. At sunset, make sure you take your supper with you and lock yourself in one of the rooms, and stay inside." She followed his instructions and they eventually got married and lived together in this way until she became pregnant. Three months of craving and three months of fleshing out and three months of skin taughtening on the bones. She was praying she would go into labour during the day and not at night, but when the baby was due, she started labour at sunset. She was frightened he might come back before the baby was born, but just as she gave birth she heard him returning, seized her child and locked herself in the room, frightened to death. In his frenzy the dog in the seven chains ate the afterbirth and as

soon as he did so, the spell was broken and he turned into a handsome young man. He begged her to open the door. She opened the door, and both were overjoyed to realise that the spell was over. He said to her:

" Thanks to you, my spell is broken and I can live normally. I must take you to my father's land and celebrate our wedding." He took her to his father's land where a big celebration was awaiting them..Seven days and seven nights where no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house.them and they lived happily and procreated.

Now that the eldest has found her destined husband and is happy and contented, let's go back to the second sister Hussayna. She walked and walked, miles and miles emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until she grew tired and hungry. She found a pool of water, drank from it and washed her face. When she saw her reflection in the water she exclaimed:

"How beautiful I am! But unlucky!" She heard a voice:

"You who are admiring yourself in the water, lift the marble slab and see what's underneath." When she lifted the slab she found a staircase. She walked down and found an extremely beautiful young woman. She enquired:

"What are you doing here?" The young woman replied:

"Don't ask. My father is the ogre. He is coming to visit me today. Come and help me and tell me all about yourself." She agreed to help her and she confided to her the secret about searching for her destined husband. The young woman promised to help her in her search, explaining that her father was the king of the ogres, and that nothing escaped his attention." A huge *couscous* was prepared for the ogre. When he came, his daughter hid her in a rolled-up mat, but he sensed a human presence and exclaimed:

"I can smell humans! Come to me, all of my possessions. Each and every one of his possessions rushed to him, except the mat. He enquired:

"Where is the mat?" His daughter answered:

"It is sick and tired out." He answered:

"Leave it to rest." After he had dinner, his daughter came to him and asked:

"Father, have you heard about the one who was swallowed up by the earth because of his exceptional beauty?" He answered:

"What? How did you come to hear that story, buried here under the earth?" He slapped her on the face and put her eye out. When the ogre left, the sister came out of hiding, apologising:

"I'm sorry I got you into trouble." She replied:

"No harm done; I will recover. Take this walnut and go and find my younger sister. She will be able to help you."

She walked and walked miles around until she found a pool of water, drank from it and washed her face. When she saw her reflection in the water she exclaimed:

"How beautiful I am! But unlucky!" She heard a voice:

"You who are admiring yourself in the water, lift the marble slab and see what's underneath." When she lifted the slab she found a staircase. She walked down and found an extremely beautiful young woman. She enquired:

"What are you doing here?" The young woman replied:

"Don't ask. My father is the ogre. He is coming to visit me today. Come and help me and tell me all about yourself." She agreed to help her and she confided to her the secret about searching for her destined husband. The young woman promised to help her in her search, explaining that her father was the king of the ogres, and that nothing escaped his attention." A huge *couscous* was prepared for the ogre. When he came, his daughter hid her in a rolled-up mat, but he sensed a human presence and exclaimed:

"I can smell humans! Come to me, all of my possessions. Each and every one of his possessions rushed to him, except the mat. He enquired:

"Where is the mat?" His daughter answered:

"It is sick and tired out." He answered:

"Leave it to rest." After he had dinner, his daughter came to him and asked:

"Father, have you heard about the one who was swallowed up by the earth because of his exceptional beauty?"

He replied:

"You know what happened to your sisters when they asked me the same question. But because you are so dear to me I will answer. Whoever wants to get to him needs one of my robes, one of my sticks and one portion of my supper. The portion is for the ants when they swarm, the stick is to help get through the mountains covered in thorns and thistles, and the robe is to escape from the other ogres." She answered:

"Who cares?" After he left she blew on the pin, which turned into a human being.

After a week, when her father was due to come again, she prepared for him a clean robe, a new stick and new shoes. When he started his meal, she shouted;

"Don't eat that, there's a hair in it." So he spat it out. Then she said to him:

"You must get rid of this old robe and stick. I've got new ones for you." He replied : "You are right, I need to change into a new robe". He took off the old robe and put on the new one and left with the new stick.

She said to her:

"Now you can start your search, take this hazelnut and use it in case of necessity and go, may you be blessed".

She kissed her goodbye and left.

Hasna walked and walked emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God. She came to a mountain covered with thorns and thistles. She struggled through it with the help of the magic stick. Then suddenly she was surrounded by ants. She threw them the ogre's morsel of food and continued on her way. She met with lions and tigers but none of them molested her because she was wearing the magic robe. She walked until she came to a grave where her destined husband was buried, as the ogre had explained to her. She was to cry until she filled seven jars and seven drinking cups with her tears, which would break the spell on him. She sat down on a bench and started to cry and cry until she filled the first, then the second and so on. She remembered her father's death and cried, she remembered her mother's death and cried, her unhappy days and cried. She cried over her bad luck, her self-sacrificeAs she was filling the seventh, a procession of people passed by and asked for water to quench their thirst. She said to herself "Maybe I should buy a serving-girl to help me through". So she gave them some water and got a black servant in exchange. Explaining to the girl that she was to fill the last jar with tears and wake her when it was full, she laid down to rest. Exhausted by her crying, she immediately fell into a sound sleep. The serving-girl only had to think of her own problems to cry her eyes out and soon filled the last jar to the brim.

He-who-was-swallowed-up-by-the-earth-because-of-his-beauty had promised he would marry whoever broke the spell. So when the last tear was shed, the grave opened and he rose from it as beautiful as the moon. He saw the woman lying there, more beautiful than he had ever imagined. He enquired "Who is this?" The black girl answered "A beggar who came to ask for alms". He asked "Was it you who cried over me?" She said "Yes, indeed". He said "Then you shall be my wife in this world and the next".

The sleeping woman woke up to find herself alone. She realised what had happened and lamented her fate. Then she got to her feet and started to walk until she came to a city which was in turmoil with the king's impending marriage, and rumours that the king's spell had been broken by a black girl. She made her way to the palace to ask for food, and was taken on as a maid.

She worked for some time until one day she saw the new bride and recognised her. She decided to take her revenge. She took out the first daughter's gift, the walnut, and broke it. When she broke it, there came out of it a tray of amber and goldfinches. She put it in the patio for the black bride to see. When she saw it she coveted it and enquired "Whose is this?" The servants answered "It belongs to the new servant. She asked for her to be brought before her. When she asked the servant to name her price, she replied "A night with your husband". The bride was taken aback but eventually gave in.

On that night, the black bride prepared the coffee with a sleeping potion in it and served it to her husband so that he would be incapable of doing anything. To test its effect, she burned his heel but he did not react. The woman was then allowed to come up to his apartment. Seeing him unconscious, she tried to shake him awake, explaining: "I am the who has loved you so dearly, I am the one cried over you, I am the one who sacrificed her life, I am the one you should have married", but to no avail. Just before sunrise the wife knocked on the door asking her to leave.

A week or so later, the young woman took out the second daughter's gift, the almond, and broke it. Out of it came a priceless robe. She spread it out in the sun for the black bride to see. When she saw it she coveted and enquired "whose is this ? The servants answered "it belongs to the new servant". She asked for her to be brought before her. When she asked the servant to name her price, she replied: "A night with your husband". The black bride was taken aback but remembering the beautiful robe, eventually gave in.

On that night again, the black bride prepared a coffee, put a sleeping potion and served it to her husband. Before allowing the servant into his apartment, she burnt his heel to test the effect of the potion. The king did not react. So she called the servant up to his apartment. The same thing happened again.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. The king went to his vizier complaining about his sore feet and inexplicable exhaustion. The vizier enquired "What did you eat last night?" The king answered "Only the usual coffee and cake before going to bed". The vizier answered "Well, next time don't drink it, and pretend to fall asleep".

A week later she took out the hazelnut and broke it. Out of it came a priceless crown studded with emeralds and rubies. Again, she left it for the bride to find and the same thing happened. But this time she took a stick to strike him awake. That very night the

king didn't drink his coffee so when the woman came he was wide awake but pretending to sleep. She cried to him, explaining "I am the one who cried over you. I am the one who filled the seven jars. I am the one who wasted her life for you, and now you pay me back by marrying a black slave". And she started to beat him. He stood up and enquired "Are you telling the truth? Was it really you?" She said "Indeed". She went to the bathroom and bathed and when she returned he gave her a priceless nightgown, and they passed the night in married bliss.

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. When the black woman came to knock, he opened the door and asked his new bride to decide what her fate should be. She said "I want four she-camels, two hungry and two thirsty, to tear her apart". And so it was done.

The order was given to celebrate the wedding, seven days and seven nights where no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the sultan's house. The king and queen lived happily for years until one day the queen yearned for her mother and sisters. She sent messengers to her sisters and they all gathered happily at their mother's house. The mother was happy to see that all her daughters had finally found their destined husbands and were living happily.

All the daughters lived safely for many years and procreated until death did them part.

(A thousand suitors ask for the hand of a girl but she will only marry her destined partner).

Once upon a time there was a farmer who had three sons. All three were called Muḥammed. All of them used to work hard in order to do well. One day, the father fell ill and had to stay in bed. A week later, his condition had not improved, and he felt he was dying. So he called his three sons and said to them: "I believe my hour has come, and I have nothing to leave you except the orchard. Muḥammed and Muḥammed will inherit, but Muhamed will not." This puzzled the three sons, but they didn't want to aggravate their father on his death-bed. Fate caught up with the father and he died. They observed the forty days' mourning as was the tradition and then sat down together to solve the puzzle of their inheritance. They could not find a solution, so decided to seek the help of the *qāḍi*.

They set off one day early in the morning and made their way to town. They walked and walked until they grew tired and had to sit down and rest. Noticing the tracks of a camel in the dust, one of them said "I think a camel has just passed by." "It is one-eyed" said the second, noticing that the grass was eaten only on one side." "It is loaded with honey and oil" said the eldest, noticing patches of oil on one side of the path and swarms of ants on the other."

As they moved off again, they met a bedouin Arab. The bedouin asked them "Have you people seen a camel?" "Did it stop to rest here?" asked the first son. The bedouin answered "Yes." The second son asked "Is your camel one-eyed?" Surprised, the man said "Oh, yes!" "Is it loaded with oil and honey?" asked the eldest son. "Yes, indeed! Have you seen it?" asked the bedouin. All three answered "No!" The bedouin accused them "You must have stolen it." An argument developed, and they all agreed to take their dispute to the *qāḍi*.

The bedouin came before the *qāḍi* and said "Master, they stole my camel." All three denied it. The bedouin explained "They identified it to me, as being one-eyed and loaded with oil and honey." The *qāḍi* addressed the three men, asking "How did you know that if you didn't steal it?" The youngest replied "I noticed camel-tracks and flattened grass where it had sat down." The second son added "The grass on one side of the path was eaten and untouched on the other side, so I presumed it was one-eyed." The eldest explained "There were patches of oil on one side and swarms of ants on the other, so I presumed it was loaded with oil and honey." "How clever of them!" the *qāḍi* thought, and sent the bedouin away. The three brothers told the *Qāḍi* of their

dilemma over the inheritance. The *qāḍi* invited them to discuss it after dinner. The meal was brought in and the *qāḍi* withdrew, supposedly to let them eat, but he stayed listening at the door.

The eldest said "This is dog-meat." The second added "Whoever cooked it is menstruating." "What else could you expect from a *wild ḥrām*, 'an illegitimate son'", explained the youngest. On hearing this, the *qāḍi* ran to his slaughterman, enquiring "Was that dog-meat?" He answered "It isn't, it's lamb that was suckled by a bitch." Then he went to his cook, and asked her "Are you menstruating?" Surprised, the cook answered "I am." By now, the *qāḍi* was beside himself. Two out of the three comments had proved to be true. He snatched a knife and ran to his mother, saying "By God, tell me the truth. Am I my father's legitimate son?" She answered "Your late father used to travel widely, may he rest in peace. One day, a peddler came with a caravan. He was tall and handsome and I as soon as I set eyes on him I was seized with burning desire to lie with him. I have sinned, I gave in to my nafs, 'life inner force', may God forgive me!"

The *qāḍi* went back to his guests, and asked the eldest "How did you know it was dog-meat?" "From the texture of the meat. We eat dog ourselves in Gabes." "And you" addressing the second son, "How did you know the cook was menstruating?" "The food was bland." Addressing the youngest, the *qāḍi* exclaimed "You are the one who will not inherit. *Ma ya'rif wild al-ḥrām kan wild al-ḥrām!* "It takes one to know one!"

A HAPPY HOME (S30)

Once upon a time there lived a poor old woman who had three daughters. She earned her living by selling the wool which her daughter spun. Each and every day she would go to the suq, sell however much God had decreed for her, and return home with a basket of provisions. One day, she was approached by a fine handsome youth elegantly dressed in a white *barnūs* and a *kashta*. He bought all the wool from her and asked her "Did you spin this yourself?" "Oh, no, sir. It's my daughters who spin it, bless them." "Would you give one of them to me in marriage?" "With joy" she replied. "The marriage contract will be drawn up next Thursday, then" he replied, giving her a purseful of money.

Overjoyed, she rushed home to tell them the news and prepare the eldest for her impending marriage. The following Thursday, a carriage was sent with the wedding-dress and veil, as was the tradition. The bride took her place in her new house. On the third day of the marriage she received a basket of provisions. When she opened it she found the grinning head of a corpse. She died of shock.

The husband came back and ate her, and threw away her head and legs in the larder. A few days later, he went back to see the old woman and told her the sad news of her daughter's death. She enquired what had happened. He said "Her time had come, God did not grant her a long life time" At that, her mother began to weep and wail.

A week later, the young man presented himself at the old woman's house and asked for the hand of the second daughter. The old woman agreed and the marriage was celebrated without delay. The new bride took her place in her new home and the same fate befell her as her sister. Her mother cried and wept over her and resigned herself to God. A week later the young man came back to ask for the hand of the youngest daughter. This time, the old woman refused. "She is my sole companion. I don't want to lose her." she explained to the young man. But 'Aysha begged to be allowed to marry him and unravel the mystery. The marriage was celebrated and 'Aysha took her place in her new home.

The following day, 'Aysha received a basket of provisions. When she opened it she found the grinning head of a corpse. She invoked God's protection, took out the head and decided to grill it and make a *couscous* with it. She made the *couscous* and served it to her husband when he came back. They lived together until 'Aysha conceived. By

then she realised that she was married to an ogre. At midnight he would go out and come back in the early morning with the stench of corpses clinging to him. When she went into labour, the ogre went to inform her mother. Meanwhile, 'Aysha prepared a *zirdāb* (makeshift hearth) in front of the house door.

When the ogre came back, he fell into the *zirdāb*, and died immediately. 'Aysha, with the help of her mother, gave birth to a male child. She took her son and went back to live with her mother. There was a crier going round the town, announcing that the qadi's wife was in labour and wanted the midwife to help. 'Aysha's mother hurried there, accompanied by her daughter and the new-born baby. With the help of God, the *qāḍī*'s wife was safely delivered of a boy. 'Aysha and her mother were asked to spend the night with her and attend the celebration the following day. Aisha's baby was laid beside the new child to sleep.

At midnight, 'Aysha's son turned to the newborn and devoured it, leaving only the head and legs. Like father, like son - he turned out to be an ogre. He woke his grandmother, saying "Granny, granny, I left his head and legs in the cradle." The grandmother soon realised what had happened. "Our heads will roll tomorrow," she thought, shaking 'Aysha awake. They picked up the child, and fled from the house. They walked until they came across the first well in their path. "He must die, just like his father," 'Aysha thought, as she flung the baby into the well.

Distressed by the catastrophe which had befallen her, 'Aysha decided to flee from the village seeking a happy home to shelter her. She walked and walked and walked, and sat on a doorstep to rest. The maid happened to come out to wash the step, and in doing so, splashed her with water. 'Aysha complained and shouted until the mistress of the house came out to see what was going on. 'Aysha explained what had happened and the woman apologised and invited her in to dry off. "What brings you here?" she asked. "I am looking for a happy home to shelter me." The mistress replied "This is a happy home, but let me tell you the whole story about my two useless daughters-in-law." "They're bone idle. They don't cook or clean. They sit around all day, eating and not lifting a finger. They are as dirty as pigs. I'm sick and tired of them." "I'll teach them a lesson," offered 'Aysha, thinking to herself "I was looking for a happy home and here I have found one with more misfortune than my own." She paid a visit to the eldest son's wife in her room. To her disgust she found the room in disorder, dirty and unaired. She scolded her, saying "What a mess! Why have you let your room get like this? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? How can you expect a husband to love you and keep you if you don't keep his home clean and comfortable?" The

daughter-in-law answered "I don't know. No-one's ever told me how." "Well, I'll teach you," 'Aysha replied. "Bring me water and a broom." Then she instructed her in how to clean and tidy up. After she finished she heated some water in a cauldron and gave the girl a bath. In the late afternoon her husband came home and was impressed at the change. The young wife took the lesson to heart and kept the place spick-and-span from then on.

'Aysha then went on to do the same for the second daughter-in-law. But all her efforts were met with indifference. The young woman refused to give up her slovenly ways. She would sit all day long, chewing and watching the other women of the house doing the domestic chores and would not offer any assistance. The mother-in-law was dissatisfied and sat every evening in the presence of her son delighting in her daughter-in-law's laziness and celebrating her lack of domestic prowess, "She is useless; she can't build a happy home. She's good for nothing". Her son grew tired of his lazy wife and soon divorced her. Aisha received two silk *fūtas* (skirt wraps) in return for her efforts, and left to continue her search.

She walked and walked, emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until she came to a house. She sat down on the doorstep to rest. Soon, the little maid came out to wash the step, and Aisha was accidentally splashed with water. She remonstrated with her, and the mistress of the house came out to see what all the commotion was about. 'Aysha complained: "They don't respect their elders any more. She's made a mess of my dress." The mistress answered "We'll give you a change of clothes, and you will be our guest for three days and three nights, as the Prophet established the tradition."

So 'Aysha went in and changed. She noticed a young woman sitting idly chewing gum. The mistress was bustling around, but the younger woman didn't lift a finger. 'Aysha enquired "Who is this?" The mistress replied ironically "She's my daughter-in-law, God bless her!!" 'Aysha sensed something strange in the girl's demeanour, and decided to observe her. At midnight the girl's eyes turned red, her hair stood on end and she went out. 'Aysha realised that shortly before this she had served her husband and mother-in-law coffee laced with a sleeping-potion. 'Aysha followed her. She heard her say "Oh, my brother, who fell down the well - I'm hungry." A voice replied "Eat your father-in-law." "But he provides for me!" she objected. "Then eat your mother-in-law." "But she waits on me!" "Eat your husband." She answered "I can't betray him." "Eat your guest, then." "Not until her three days' hospitality are up."

The voice replied "Go and find a dead donkey at Bab Aliwa." The young woman ran off in the direction of Bab Aliwa in search of her prey.

'Aysha went back to the house and when the morning came she informed the mother-in-law "Your daughter-in-law is an ogress." "An ogress!" she exclaimed in horror. "What shall we do?" "I'll tell you what we'll do," said 'Aysha. "We will take her to the baths with a big bowl full of sponges to stuff in her mouth if she should try to eat anyone." Her husband was instructed to talk her into going to the baths, by an oath if necessary. *Ogresses cannot stand the heat. A zirdāb*, 'open hearth' was prepared in front of the house.

The young wife refused to go to the baths on the grounds that she was afraid. "'Aysha will accompany you," her husband explained. Eventually she was persuaded. As soon as she stepped into the bath she grew wild. Aisha stuffed the sponges into her mouth one by one, until she finished bathing. Then they walked back home. Just before reaching the threshold, Aisha pushed the young woman into the *zirdāb*, saying "Your brother is an ogre, your brother's son is an ogre, and you are an ogre! I am the one who will rid the world of your evil!" The ogress burned to a cinder.

'Aysha went into the house. She was received with great rejoicing. "You must stay with us," the old mistress invited. "I shall not. I came to seek a happy home, but your misfortune is worse than my own. Let me go back to my home." 'Aysha settled in the House of God.

And there we left her, never to hear of her ever since.

KHIRA'S REPERTOIRE

YOU WHO REBEL AGAINST FATE, RISE AND FACE WHAT GOD HAS
ORDAINED (K1)

Declare God's onness and he who has sinned implore his pardon

Once upon a time there was a perfume merchant who was married to his cousin. She was dearer than life to him and they lived happily. They were filled with joy and merriment. He called her, *Lillāt*, and she called him, *Sīdi*. They manifested a deep love and mutual devotion which defied description. But their happiness was not complete: in her sleep she would heave a deep sigh of unhappiness. This discomforted the husband and he tried to understand the reason for her uneasiness. He could not remember failing to see to her well being. He had always provided fine clothes and jewellery for her to wear and she was well-fed. He became pre-occupied and worried. This didn't go unnoticed by a venerable old man, who enquired about his anxiety. The husband told him "I have a problem. It's my wife... who always heaves a deep sigh in her sleep. I can't imagine why. She lacks for nothing; clothes, jewellery, money. I provide everything she could possibly want." The elderly man replied "I know the answer. Get a black billy-goat and take it to the house. Keep it out of her sight. When she goes to sleep, around midnight, kill the goat, open it and remove its heart while it is still warm and put it on her chest and listen. You will hear why she sighs". He replied "God bless you." He did as the old man suggested. *Life was different in those days; wives did not question what their husbands did. There was mutual trust.*

A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. He brought the billy-goat to the house and hid it in the cellar. On the same night he pretended he was tired and suggested going to bed early. When he was sure she was fast asleep he killed the goat, removed its heart, lit a candle placed the heart on her chest and asked "Why do you sigh?" The heart answered "Because of the indignity I have to suffer. I will be a beggar for a year, a thief for a year and a whore for a year." As soon as the word 'whore' was uttered, the candle dripped on her cheek and woke her. Seeing the bloody heart, she asked what was going on. As he had no secrets from her, he told her what was awaiting her. It sorrowed her and she breaks out in lament: "Time is fickle, why does it bear hostility to me? How can I disgrace my cousin after such a life of luxury and pampering? I'd rather die than disgrace my beloved husband" *Indeed no one knows what destiny has in store for us.*

The following day, after her husband went out to work, the indignity of the previous evening was still preying on her mind. So she decided to take her own life. She took out a sharp knife, cut her throat and fell to the floor, unconscious. Her Hour has not come yet. *In those days, there were no doctors and no emergency calls.* When she was discovered she was soon washed and laid out and buried. After the last person left, she received a blow and heard a voice saying "You who rebel against fate, rise and face what God has ordained for you."

She rose up from her grave. She had nowhere to go and didn't want to go back to her house. She stood at the cemetery gates and started to beg. When night fell, she took refuge in a mausoleum. The next day she bought a dress and got rid of her shroud. For a whole year she begged. The following year she became a thief. She would steal purses, watches, anything. She grew tired of stealing. In the meantime, she got to know some prostitutes and was soon drawn into their way of life. She had a good voice and became famous and was in great demand for weddings, like Shāfia Rushdi in those days or Şufiyya Şādiq, *by the way they now call her Şufiyya Şnādaq!*...

The husband, after the funeral, came back home, sad and heavy-hearted. He swore he would never marry again after he lost his beloved cousin. The first year passed, then the second, and the third, and he was still alone. Well-meaning neighbours and relatives tried to reason with him and talk him into remarrying: "it was God's will, *Qaḍa wa Qadar* that your wife had died, we shall all take our turn, bear it with patience, patience is an article of faith, otherwise you will be damned." But his heart was broken for ever. They eventually persuaded him to marry again. For the wedding they decided to engage the famous singer to entertain the guests. She had taken a stage name. When she arrived at the house, she recognised her house, her husband. She stood singing before the guests. At the end of the evening she sang an improvised verse which went "How strange for me to be here tonight, singing at my husband's wedding in my own house..." The husband understood the message, rose to his feet, wrapped his cloak around her and took her to the bridal chamber. He called the witnesses and cancelled the marriage-contract with the new bride, sent the guests away and,

they lived safely and procreated until death did them part.

COMPANIONSHIP (K2)

Since the subject of loyalty was brought up in our conversation, let me tell you to what extent loyalty can bind people together.

Declare God's onness and He who has sinned invoke his pardon

Once upon a time there was a king and there is no king but Allāh, who had an only daughter. He was very pious and never missed a prayer. One day, after he finished his morning prayer there appeared a horse-head before him. He greeted him with the respect due to a king and asked him for his daughter's hand. The king refused straight away. The horse's head warned him that his daughter would turn into a stone for a year, a bird for a year and an ogress for a year if he didn't give her to him in marriage. The king still refused on the ground that what shall be, shall be. The horse's head would appear every day and repeat the same threat, but the king didn't yield and kept the secret to himself. One day the daughter got up early and heard her father talking to somebody. She eavesdropped on the conversation. *In those days girls used to be modest, decent and considerate of their elders; nowadays girls are arrogant and callous.* What she heard sorrowed her, but she didn't talk it over with her father *in olden times, girls were modest, their voices were not to be heard, let alone their complaints and grievances.* She said to herself "How can a princess like me, after a life of luxury and pampering, suffer such indignities? What have I done to deserve such a misfortune, *muṣība*. How could I bring shame, *il-'ār* on my fathers. I must leave this country as soon as possible."

She went to her appartments and sat lost in thought. "I need a confidante and companion to help me through my misfortune." She remembered their neighbour the carpenter who had three daughters. *In my generation the relationship based on mā and milḥ, was similar to that which related brothers and sisters. Our neighbours used to visit us and assist us in sickness and in health, in weddings and in mournings. We shared mā and milḥ. Nowadays neither the one nor the other matters any more. No one cares any more about anyone else except his little self.* She said to herself "I'll put them to the test and choose the most discreet." She summoned the neighbour and asked him to allow his eldest daughter to come and spend the day with her. "It will be an honour" he answered.

A new day is born and he who praises the Prophet will be blessed, the neighbour's eldest daughter rose early, dressed herself in her best clothes. *In those days, it was quite something for girls to go out.* Then her father took her to the palace. As she entered, she found the princess at her embroidery. She greeted the princess, who returned her greeting and sat her on the floor at her embroidery hoop. *In those days, people used to sit on mattresses on the floor; there were no armchairs and sofas.* The girl sat down without a word, embroidering. Several hours went by in silence. At midday, Dāda came to ask her mistress to lunch, but not the girl. After lunch, the princess came back to her embroidery. Later a tray with tea and cake was brought to her. The other girl sat watching in silence. At sunset, the girl's father came for her and asked if she wanted to stay overnight. She declined. The princess asked Dāda to follow them and hear what the girl would say to her father. As soon as the girl arrived at their house she started to complain about her fast and swore she would never go there again. Dāda overheard what she said and related it to her mistress, who decided that the girl was not to be trusted and taken as a companion and confidante in her misfortune.

The following day she summoned the neighbour again and asked him for his second daughter. Exactly the same thing happened and the second daughter came back home complaining about her long day's fast at the princess's palace. The princess decided again that the second daughter was not to be trusted and taken as a confidante. She decided to put 'Aysha the youngest to the test.. 'Aysha proved cunning. As soon as she entered and was seated at her hoop, she struck up a light-hearted conversation with the princess and suggested they should work at the same frame, and chat to pass the time away. The whole morning flew by, and Dāda came to summon her mistress to lunch. The girl reproached her for not inviting her too. They all went to have lunch, and then came back to work. In the afternoon, Dāda brought a tray of cakes and tea to her mistress. 'Aysha asked why she was not entertained too. Dāda came back with another tray for her. The princess soon realised that the youngest was lively, talkative and agreeable to be with. At sunset, her father came for her, but she informed him she wanted to stay overnight. That night, they slept in the same bed. and the princess took her into her confidence. She advised her to resign herself to God and to bear it with patience. They vowed loyalty to each other and made a blood-pact by cutting their fingers and mingling their blood. The princess informed her about her future plans to leave the country for another land. They agreed to summon a carpenter to build them a watertight cabin that closed from the inside. When the cabin was ready they had it stocked with provisions - wheat, sugar, oil, *couscous*, everything they would need. One day she called the carpenter, gave him a purse of money and asked him to come

back in the evening with his friends and throw the cabin into the water with them inside. That night, after she had dinner with her father, she bade him goodnight and withdrew supposedly to sleep. She crept to the cabin with her companion and they locked themselves inside. At midnight, the carpenter and his friends came with a barrow to transport the cabin. The barrow rumbled along till they reached the shore. The men joined forces, heaved the cabin into the water and left. The cabin was tossed by the waves and the girls could not tell day from night, nor lunch from supper. They would simply eat when they felt hungry. One day, a huge wave tossed them up on the shore of a distant land. The cabin had turned green with seaweed. By now, the girls had run out of provisions. The carpenter's daughter 'Aysha suggested she should creep out of the cabin at dusk and go to find some food. They remained hidden until sunset. The carpenter's daughter disguised herself and went out. She walked and walked, until she came to a mansion. She decided to creep in unseen and steal some food. She came to a table set with all sorts of savoury and sweet dishes, *savoury and sweet delicacies in crystal bowls*. She filled two bags and left the place. She came back to the cabin and shared with the princess what God had sent them.

Back to the mansion...which belonged in fact to the prince. He was in the habit of having a table set for himself alone. The servants would set the table and his mother would cast a final glance over it to make sure that everything was in order. That evening the servants set the table and the mother checked that all was in place. When the prince came to have dinner, he found that someone had disturbed it. He summoned his mother, who assured him that she did check it and that perhaps he was imagining it, as he stayed up late. The following day, the same thing happened. On the third day the princess decided that it was her turn to go and find food.

The prince, on the second occasion, seeing the table so obviously in disarray, decided to sit up the following night and wait for the offender. The princess insisted that night to go and find food. *It was her fate! She could not escape it.* At sunset, the princess left the cabin, following her companion's directions. She crept into the palace and as she was stealing the food, the prince came out of his hiding-place and wrapped his cloak around her. "There you are! I've caught you." He summoned his mother and asked her to get ready for his wedding. The princess agreed to marry him on condition he would build her a private apartment which no-one else could enter, and bring the cabin that was on the shore into the garden. They came to an agreement. The following day, work began on her apartment, and the preparations for the wedding, seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was prepared except in the sultan's house. After a week, when it was ready, she had her companion creep into

her private apartment. She would share all her meals with her, down to even a date. The marriage was celebrated. *A husband is for a woman what a lid is for a cooking pot.* The princess's friend occupied an inner room in the apartment. After the prince left, they would share tea and laughter, and nobody was any the wiser. One afternoon, as they were chatting, the princess felt a chill, shook all over three times and turned into a bird. 'Aysha, the carpenter's daughter, cried out "May God protect you!" The princess asked "Will you keep your vow?" 'Aysha answered "He who promises never breaks his word." The bird-princess flew away. 'Aysha cried and wailed, not knowing what to tell the prince. When Dāda came up, she changed her voice and said "Dāda, I have just received a letter. *In those days, pigeons carried letters.* My father has died and it is a tradition in our land to mourn our dead for three years. During this period, I will see nobody and nobody will see me. I want you to bring my meals on a tray and clap your hands to announce them."

'Aysha spent the whole year telling her beads and moved a chick-pea from one pile to another with every day that passed. The bird-princess would come every morning and ask her "Will you keep your vow?" and 'Aysha would answer "He who promises never breaks his word."

On day the prince decided to creep into the princess's apartment up and cast a secret glance at her in her mourning. As he did so, he saw the bird-princess and decided to hunt it. He shot it. The bird fell to the floor with a thud. He rushed down the stairs not to be discovered. 'Aysha jumped to her feet and came to rescue the bird princess. She pulled out the arrow and nursed the wound with honey and olive oil until it healed.

On the last day of the third year the bird-princess came back to the palace through the window and settled on the sofa where her friend was sitting. She was welcomed with joy and affection, but soon she turned into an icy-cold stone. 'Aysha would pile blankets on top of her and would light many braziers to heat the room. At night she would sleep with her in her arms and count each and every day that passed. There remained a week of the second year and 'Aysha started to worry about her mistress's third ordeal. She called Bāba Srūr the porter, in olden times they used to be called *Bāba Srūr*, and talked to him through the closed door. *In olden times women did not meet men face to face, and even their hands were covered.* She gave him a purse of gold and a big straw bag and asked him to take it to the Bab Jabli and leave it there until he was asked to bring it back in due course. On the last day of the second year 'Aysha wrapped the stone in a fine woollen blanket, recited some verses from the Qu'rān over it, embraced it with tears running down her cheeks and put it in the bag and gave it to Bāba Srūr.

'Aysha spent the whole year weeping and wailing about her mistress's plight. She would count each and every day that passed and pray incessantly until the year was over. The following morning the prince asked to be allowed back into his wife's apartment, but he was told to wait another fortnight to allow the princess to wash her hands with *henna* and leave her days of mourning behind. Meanwhile, 'Aysha summoned Bāba Srūr and asked him to bring back the straw bag with whatever was in it, making sure he wasn't seen. Bāba Srūr went to collect the bag but he found an ugly old lady with prominent teeth and unkempt hair in its place. He wrapped her in blankets and carried her all the way to the palace. 'Aysha met him on the stairs, took her from him weeping and wailing over her and gave her a good bath straight away. A new day is born and he who prays for the Prophet will be blessed. She then asked for a substantial meal to be brought; vegetable broth, grilled lamb and liver, and fruit. She fed her every day for a week until the princess recovered her strength, stamina and beauty. She then asked to be dressed in her best clothes. 'Aysha did so. The prince was overjoyed to see his wife again, *after all, he had been celibate for three years!*. He complained that three years were too long to be in mourning. She explained it was the tradition in their country and that with patience and resignation it was now over. They had dinner and made their way to the bedroom. As she undressed, the prince noticed the scar on her thigh and enquired about it. The princess explained that it was a simple scar but the prince did not believe her and insisted on hearing the whole story, promising he would stand by her, come what may. She related the whole story of her inescapable fate to him and told him about her companion living in her private apartment. "No power can withhold what Allah gives, patience has brought you through it, patience is beautiful". *Patience is the key to all problems, patience is a virtue* 'Aysha came out dressed in her best and beautiful as the moon, praise to God who created her with such a beauty. Seeing her beauty he swore to find her a husband that very night. He went down, summoned the notaries and had the marriage contract drawn up between 'Aysha and the vizier's son.

And they all lived safely and procreated until death did them part

Declare God's oneness, and he who has sinned implore his pardon

Once upon a time there was a king - and there is no king but Allāh - who had a son who was very dear to him, but had no interest in women. In a distant land there was a king who had six daughters but no sons. The last time his wife conceived, she gave birth to a seventh daughter. God willed it so. The king was upset, but his wife said: 'God willed it, what can we do.' The new baby was so beautiful that the king became fond of her, and she grew into a charming and well-educated girl, the centre of attention. Her sisters grew jealous, and decided to plot against her. One day, their father the king informed them that he was going to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and whoever wanted anything brought back should write it on a piece of paper. The sisters seized the opportunity. They went to see their younger sister and told her: "We have found something precious for you to ask Father for." She asked "What?" They answered "Ḥabb al-Gtār." Delighted at the suggestion, the youngest sister wrote it on a piece of paper, folded it and gave it to her father. All the girls wrote down their wishes and gave them to their father.

After carrying out his pilgrimage to Mecca, the king took out the sheets of paper, thinking "Now I must see to my dear daughters' wishes." He bought something for each of them, except the youngest. Each time he mentioned Ḥabb al-Gtār, the merchants smiled and said "That's not for sale." The king approached an old man and asked him what it could be. The old man replied "Whoever asked for it is either being led into danger or wishes your death. This is the name of a prince who has no interest in women."

In the afternoon the king went to the prince's palace and sought an audience. He was soon shown in, greeted the prince with the deference due to his rank and gave him the piece of paper explaining it was his favourite daughter's dearest wish. The prince opened the sheet of paper and smiled, saying "This is a blade to cut her hair, *it was shameful for maidens to cut their hair*, a knife held at her throat, rather than see Ḥabb al-Gtār in her palace." The king left, affronted. As soon as he arrived home, he called his vizier, threatening "Your head will roll if you don't bring me a glass of little 'Aysha's blood for that was his youngest daughter's name." The news reached her mother. *Mothers are more tender-hearted.* Without understanding what was going

on, she hid 'Aysha in a cave, then took a rabbit, killed it, filled a glass with its blood and sent it to the king.

Little 'Aysha lived heartbroken in the dark, empty cave, puzzled by her father's decision to kill her. One day, she called her mother, saying "I miss Father; bring me something of his as a keepsake." Her mother did so. 'Aysha, on receiving her father's robe, reached into the pocket and drew out a folded piece of paper, which read "A blade to cut her hair, a knife held at her throat, rather than see Ḥabb al-Gtār in her palace." She was devastated by what she read and called her mother: "My sisters led me into this, and I must avenge myself on the prince and purge my father's honour. Tomorrow at first light I shall set off. At sunrise her mother gave her provisions and saw her off, wishing her Godspeed.

'Aysha travelled and travelled disguised in men's clothes emptying one land and filling another and no land can be filled except by our dear almighty God, until she reached Ḥabb al-Gtār's land. She was weary and tired. She knocked on the door of a house and was received by an old woman. She confided that she was a woman and that she needed shelter for the night. The old woman informed her that she was a widow and that she would be glad of the girl's company. The following morning 'Aysha gave the woman a thousand riyals and told her to buy her an expensive dress and later sell her as a slave girl, but only to the prince Ḥabb al-Gtār.

Ḥabb al-Gtār was melancholy, and all the court physicians were summoned to cure him of his lack of interest in women, to no avail. The queen was taking a stroll in the market and saw the slave girl up for sale, and marvelled at her beauty. The queen made the highest bid for her at auction, and took her back to the palace with her, saying "May my son's cure come through you."

'Aysha from that day on served the prince dutifully but he didn't even raise his eyes to look at her. One evening, as he was washing his hands, he saw her face in the mirror and marvelled at her beauty. He enquired "How long have you been here?" "Two weeks, my lord." He summoned his mother and said to her "I want to marry her. Prepare for the wedding." The queen gave the order to celebrate the wedding. Seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was cooked except at the Sultan's house. 'Aysha went to visit the old woman who had sheltered her and asked her to prepare a horse for her on her wedding day.

On the wedding day 'Aysha sat among her peers, but outshone them all. Ḥabb al-Gtār was overjoyed and impatient to find himself tete-a-tete with his bride. After the guests had left, 'Aysha went to her bridal chamber, put on her nightgown and asked permission to go to the bathroom. The prince waited and waited but she failed to return. He summoned his mother and the order was given to look for her in the palace. The prince threw himself on the bed in despair, and found the slip of paper under the pillow which read: "A blade to cut his moustache, *in the past, it was shameful for men to cut their moustache*, a knife held at his throat, rather than see little 'Aysha in his bed." He realised what had happened and summoned the guards to accompany him in his search for 'Aysha.

Meanwhile, 'Aysha mounted her horse and headed for her father's land. She arrived at sunset and went straight to the cave where she used to hide. Early the next morning, a ship full of soldiers docked in the port. A messenger was sent to her father saying "Either you hand 'Aysha over to us or we will wage war until we destroy you." Her father was puzzled; how could he produce 'Aysha when he had ordered her to be killed? He was at a loss to know what to do. His wife confided to him that she had never agreed to kill her own flesh and blood, and that consequently 'Aysha was still alive. The king was overjoyed and soon the order was given to celebrate her wedding for seven days and seven nights when no fire was lit and no food was prepared except at the sultan's palace.

There we left them and we have never seen them since.

THE CLEVER PEASANT GIRL (K4)

Declare God's onness, and he who has sinned invoke his pardon

Once upon a time, there was a king who went out in disguise with his vizier to stroll about the city. They walked and walked until they came to a *sāniya*, 'orchard'. They went in, and found a well and a water-wheel. The king heard the clicking of the mechanism as it turned, and addressed his vizier "What do you think it is trying to say?" Surprised, the vizier answered "Trying to say? Do you think water-wheels speak? It is only turning to raise water." The king replied "I grant you three days, at the term of which you must tell me what the water-wheel is saying, otherwise your head will roll."

The vizier went back home, sad and troubled, dragging one foot after the other, the eyes are a jar and the lap a pitcher, and thinking "My hour has come." He went back home with tears in his eyes. This didn't go unnoticed by his daughters, who asked "What's wrong, father?" He replied "Leave me alone. I am not in the mood for talking." His youngest daughter, who was his favourite, begged him "Won't you tell me what is making your heart so heavy?" He replied "Where shall I start?" and he told her of his plight. She comforted him, saying "Take it easy. Leave your morose ideas away and tomorrow is another day, God will fulfil our wishes. Go and see the farmer working in the *sāniya*. He might be able to help you." The vizier was somewhat soothed.

A new day is born and he who praises the Prophet will be blessed, he got up early and hurried to the *sāniya*, and sought out the farmer. He found an old man tending some plants, so he greeted him and struck up conversation. He then related his story to him, asking his advice. The farmer's daughter, who had been standing behind him, said "I can tell you what the water-wheel says. Relax and be happy, and I will soon let you know." The vizier was invited to stay three days and nights with them, as was the tradition established by the Prophet. The vizier spent the three days ill-at-ease and eagerly anticipating the answer. On the third day, the farmer's daughter approached him, saying "Now go to your king and tell him this:

I used to be a cheerful tree. The carpenter chopped
me into planks. Now I weep and wail.

At this, the vizier was thrilled, and hurried straight off to the king's palace. He greeted the king with the deference due to him and said "Your majesty, I have got the answer." The king replied "Well done! So what is it?" The vizier answered "The water-wheel says:

I used to be a cheerful tree. The carpenter chopped
me into planks. Now I weep and wail.

Surprised, the king commented "Now, this is not your discovery. Someone told you." The vizier protested, saying "Your majesty! How can you disbelieve me?" The king persisted "Either you tell me the truth, or your head will roll." So the vizier said "Your majesty, when you set me this test, I went to see the farmer in the orchard and sought his help. His daughter gave me the answer." The king ordered him "Hurry back and ask for her hand on my behalf."

The vizier went that very day to the farmer and asked for his daughter's hand for his Majesty the king. The farmer was overjoyed, but he said "I must ask my daughter's opinion." When the daughter was consulted, she answered "I'd be most honoured, but on condition he would build me a palace on top of his own. When he sits in court, I'd like to watch and listen from my window." The vizier went back to the king and told him about the condition. The king answered "Her wish will be carried out."

Builders and carpenters and painters started working on the palace day and night. Within a month it was ready. The order was given to celebrate the wedding, seven days and seven nights, where no fire was lit and no food was cooked except in the king's house. The wedding was planned for the following Thursday. On that day a carriage was sent to the village to bring the bride, and the marriage took place. The festivities lasted for seven days and seven nights, and the king and his peasant bride were blissfully happy. On the seventh day, the king put on his ceremonial costume and went down to sit in court. His wife drew up a chair to her window and settled down to watch and listen. All sorts of cases passed before him, and she sat through them all. One day, two farmers brought a dispute before the king. The first farmer said "Your Majesty, I have a she-camel and he has a mare. Both were pregnant. One day, they gave birth in the middle of the night. When we got up, we found the she-camel suckling a foal and the mare suckling a baby camel. Have you ever heard of a camel bearing a foal?" The king said "It could be the result of a craving." The farmer protested "That's impossible!" The king insisted "Quite possible!" The farmer

exclaimed "That's odd!" The king said "There is nothing odd in God's Creation. Whatever each of you found, take it and that's an end to it. Case dismissed!"

As the two men were leaving, she called the plaintiff whom she felt had been wronged "You there! Listen. Go back to the king and tell him you had a quintal of barley which you had grown on the sea-shore. The fish came out of the water and ate it. If he says 'Do fish eat barley?', answer 'Do camels bear foals?'" So the farmer hurried back to the palace and asked to see the king urgently. When he came before him, the king said "Your case was settled. Are you bringing another action?" The farmer answered "No, your Majesty, I've come to ask you something else. I had a quintal of barley which I had grown on the sea-shore. The fish came out of the water and ate it." The king scoffed "That's the last thing I could believe! Do fish eat barley?" The farmer replied "Do camels bear foals?" The king thought to himself "That must be her idea." He said to the farmers "You take your camel, and you take your mare." And he hurried up to his wife, saying "By God, you are divorced. Take whatever you want, and go." She answered "Grant me three days to pack." He replied "Take a week if you want." And with that, he left.

The Queen immediately summoned a porter and gave him a purse of gold and told him "Go to the carpenter and ask him to make a case big enough for a man to hide in. Cover it with velvet of the highest quality, and bring it to me within three days." The Queen continued to serve the king's dinner until the three days were up. On the third night, she served him tea after his dinner, spiked with a sleeping potion. As soon as he drank it, the king keeled over, unconscious. With the help of Dāda, she picked him up and put him in the case. Then she called the coachman to load it into the carriage.

The Queen arrived at her father's *sāniya* with the king hidden in her luggage. As she entered the tent, she unlocked the case and laid the king on a divan, stretching out next to him until the morning. The cool morning breeze revived the king, who woke to the lowing of the cows and the chirping of the birds. "Am I dreaming?" he thought. He turned and found his wife beside him. He enquired "Where am I?" She replied "You're with me, safe and sound." He asked "What brought me here?" She replied "You told me to leave and take with me whatever I valued most. I thought, gold and silk are earthly possessions. What else do I have dearer than you? So I brought you with me." He replied delightedly, "Come back with me." The carriage brought them back to the palace and from that day on, the Queen sat in court with him.

FATE (K5)

Declare God's oneness and he who has sinned implore his pardon

Once upon a time there was a chief of a tribe who was married to a barren woman. He had always yearned for a child to fill the house with joy, until God willed that she should bear him a child. She went into labour and gave birth to a baby girl as beautiful as the moon. The chief of the tribe had a brother who had a son, who was then twenty. Tradition had it that he would marry his cousin, but the young man wasn't prepared to take a wife so much younger. He was a thief and decided to bide his time until he could sneak into his uncle's house to steal something. As he was doing so, he saw two men come in and make their way to the baby's cot. He followed them and hid to watch. They took the baby between them and sat on the floor to write her destiny. One asked "What name shall we give her?" The other answered "Beauty", so he wrote it on her forehead. Then he asked "What shall her term be?" The other answered "Such and such." Then "Who is to be her destined husband?" The other answered "That thief hiding in the corner is to be her legitimate husband, and she will take a lover besides." They wrote it all on her forehead and put her back in her cot, and left the room.

The young man was taken aback by what he heard and saw and decided to cut her in two rather than disgrace himself by taking an adulterous wife. A new day is born and he who praised the Prophet will be blessed, to his surprise, there was no news of her death; on the contrary, she was found safe and sound and more beautiful than ever.

The girl was brought up spoilt, being an only child, and her cousin couldn't get his predicted fate out of his mind. So he hastened to take a wife and have children to escape his fate. After some years he decided to go to the city to look for work.

The girl came of age to marry and many suitors presented themselves to ask for her hand. But her father refused to give her to an outsider. The cousin was summoned by his father and ordered to marry the girl. *In those days, a father's word was law.* At first he refused, but finally gave in and came back to marry her, but decided to watch her carefully. He never trusted her but watched her every move.

She was young and beautiful. Praise to God the creator. Wherever she went she attracted attention and many young men courted her although everyone knew she was married. In order to rid herself of their attentions, she told them she had a lover who was the king of Egypt who came once a month to visit her. Her admirers didn't believe her, and one of them decided to go and find out for himself if it was true.

So he travelled on horseback, filling one land and emptying the other and no land can be filled except by Almighty God, until he came to Egypt. He happened to arrive on the Eid, when the fast of *Ramaḍān* is broken. Everyone was going to present their respects to the king on this occasion, so he decided to join them. After he had done so, he asked to see the king privately. His request was granted, so when he came before him he asked "I hope your honour doesn't mind me asking you this question: In our village there is a girl of exceptional beauty who is married to someone twenty years older. Each and every young man of the village hoped to win her love but she said your honour was her lover." The king smiled to himself, but warned him angrily "Don't any of you dare to trouble her any more." With these words, he left.

The king turned the idea over in his mind again and again, and said to himself "Why should a bedouin girl choose me, of all people?" He had a brother who lived in that village, so he decided to pay him a visit and find out whether the girl really loved him.

When he came to the village, he found a shepherd and asked him if he knew where Mr So-and-So lived. The shepherd answered "I happen to work for them." The king gave him a purse of gold and asked him to take him to the house in secret. The shepherd suggested he could hide him among the cattle.

That night, the husband's first wife went into labour so the husband went to congratulate her together with his young bride. While he stayed on, the young bride made her way back to her own house alone. *Being in the country, the hut had no electricity.* On entering, she found a man sleeping in her bed. She inquired "Who are you?" He answered "Shhhh". She lit an oil lamp and asked "What made you come here?" He answered "Aren't I your lover, the King of Egypt? You asked for me and here I am." She was taken aback, but passed the night with him, that was her fate, God willed it. Now, as her husband didn't trust her, he came back in the middle of the night to check on her and discovered them together. He immediately brought a camel-chain and shackled them. In the morning he went to call her folk and make a scene. She woke up in fright to find her feet tied to those of her lover, and decided to act immediately. Rising carefully to their feet together, they managed to hobble to the door

of the hut, where she found her stepson. He had always had a soft spot for her, and she had no difficulty in persuading him to release her lover from the chain and take his place, on the grounds that if anything happened to him, the whole country would be thrown into chaos. When her husband returned, accompanied by a throng of people, they seized the sides of the tent and tore it open. She opened her eyes and her stepson exclaimed "Whatever's wrong, father?" All the elders turned to the husband abusively "Have you gone mad? You suspicious bastard! He's like her own son." The stepson explained "The night became chilly so I slipped in beside Dādah for warmth." At this, the husband became the butt of insults from the crowd and kept silent, but was not convinced.

Time passed. The husband wanted to set his mind at rest and find out the truth. So he chose a beautiful slave girl and bought seven black slaves and travelled with them to Egypt to present them to the king. When the husband saw him, he recognised him immediately. Seven days later, he invited the king to accompany him on a hunting party. Each took his own weapons and they set off. When they arrived at a deserted clearing, the husband pointed his gun at the king and asked "Wasn't it you I found with Beauty that night?" The king replied "Indeed it was. Had you harmed her in any way I would have killed you and married her." The husband answered "You could neither kill me nor marry her. I have not yet reached the end of my misfortunes. I just wanted to find out the truth." And he related the whole story to the king. The king in turn explained that he too was destined to seduce her. The husband continued "It was ordained that she should remain with me and bear me two children." The king reproached him "Why then did you investigate, and rebel against what God has willed?"

So he travelled back to his village and took back his wife. A few years later she bore him two children and lived safely and procreated until death did them part. (And thus the eyes saw what God had written on the forehead).

THE PROPHET SULEYMĀN AND THE GRIFFON (K6)

Declare God's oness and he who has sinned implore his pardon

Once upon a time, when birds could talk, the prophet Suleymān was discussing fate with a griffon.

She said : "Caution can thwart fate.", *al-hadhar yighlib al-qadar*.

The prophet Suleymān insisted that God's will must always triumph. She strongly denied it. The Prophet Suleymān told her : "So-and-so's wife is going to give birth to a daughter who, when grown-up, will marry the prince, bear a child by him and nobody will know. Can you prevent that?"

The bird answered: "I will look after her and prevent it from happening."

He told her: "The baby is due today."

She answered: "I will kidnap her today."

When the baby girl was born, the bird came unseen and stole her away. She travelled with her for miles under the sea until they reached a far-away island and settled there. (It was the girl's fate to live on that island.) There was no-one else there. She fed her from her beak year after year until the girl turned fifteen.

In a far-away land the king's son fell ill and all the physicians in the land were summoned, but none could find a cure for his condition. A sage advised the king to send his son away on a voyage for a change of scene. A ship was laid on for him with everything he could possibly need; provisions, entertainment and companions. They set sail, and everyone tried to entertain the prince, but to no avail. A storm arose, in which the ship was tossed on the waves and driven onto the shore in a far-away land. The prince suggested he would explore the island, unaccompanied. Nobody dared object. As he was exploring, he heard a girl's voice coming from underground. He asked: "Who are you?" She answered: "I am the bird's daughter, and I have never seen anyone on this island before." He asked: "How can you be the daughter of a bird, and can talk?" She answered: "I don't know. I only realised when I grew up that my mother is a bird. She would fly away during the day and come back to me at night. He said: "But you're a human being.!" She gave him a copious meal and invited him to stay with her and they lived happy together for weeks. When the bird came back, she would hide him. Oblivious, the bird never noticed. A veil of distraction descended on her. The prince grew fond of the girl and recovered from his melancholy. He didn't want to leave.

Since the Prophet Suleymān was omniscient, he knew that the girl was now carrying a child, *such is God's decree*, and would soon give birth. He summoned the bird and asked her: "Is your daughter grown-up yet or not?" The bird replied: "Yes, she is. Didn't you predict that by now she would be bearing a child? Well, she isn't. What about God's will then?" He answered: "I want to see her right now." She said: "How can I do that? It's too windy for her." He said: "cover her, then, but bring her." The bird flew back to the island and told her daughter that the Prophet Suleymān wanted to see her. She agreed to go, on condition that she would be carried in a palanquin. She managed to hide her lover in it without the bird noticing. The bird flew away with the palanquin suspended from her strong beak, and came before the prophet Suleyman. He called : "Daughter of so-and-so, come out. Son of so-an-so, come out, too. The girl waddled out, followed by the prince. The bird gaped. The prophet asked her: "Now, tell me how all this could happen, in spite of your caution. For Allāh willed it in order to accomplish ordainment upon his creature" The bird shrieked and flew off, and never came back to earth again. *What is written shall be!*

APPENDIX TWO

The appendix contains the Arabic texts of selected stories.

كان يا ما كان الله في كل مكان

ثم سلطان عنده بنته . كانت على غاية من الجمال وغاية من العقل وغاية من الصبر. حط معلقة على قصره وقت الي وصلت الى سن الزواج يقول فيها " ما نعطيها كان اللي يملى لي ثلاثة اماجن من المال اللي يجي باش يخطب يقرأ المعلقة يرجع على طريقه . نهار من النهارات هو قاعد في القنارية مع الوزير . رمى عينه يلقي البحر تملا بالمراكب خزر له الوزير قال له " يا سيدي كانها محلة جات في حالة سلم رانا ماناش باش نمونوها وكانت في حالة حرب ما عندناش باش نقاوموها "

قال له " برّشوف اشني احكايتهم وايجا اخبرني " هبط الوزير جاء لقائد المركب وقال له " ماوا لباس . حالة حرب والا حالة سلم "

قالوا " جينا لا باش نحاربوا لا باش نضيفوا ، جينا خاطبين راغبين في بنت الحسب و النسب "

قالوا له " هل تعرفوا الشرط "

قال له " نعرفوا وهانا جينا ما لازمنا في المراكب "

قال له " لشكون "

قال له " لولد الملك الفلاني "

قال له " تفضل معاي "

طلع للملك وتقدم وقال له " جيناكم نخطبوا في بنت الحسب والنسب "

قال له " على راسي وعيني اما تعرفوا الشرط "

قالوا " نعرفوه "

قال له " قالوا الخميس الجاي يكون العرس وتقيموا بحذانا ثلاثة ايام وثلاثة ليالي ونهزها لبلاد بابا وجدودي "

قال له " وبعد باش نعملوا عرس في بلاد بابا "

قال له " الله يبارك "

عرّس عليها . امر بالمتفرحات سبعة ايام و سبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ و لا

من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان. نهاية سابع يوم الصباح صبح واللي

يصلي عل النبي يربح قال لها " اسمع راني باش نهزك لبلاد بابا اما لا

تقلي باش نهز المدبة ولا المعلمة لا اختي ولا عمتي الا اذا الوصيفة

تهزها معاك حد اخر ما يمشيش - راسي راسك "

فرغوا عادا هما المراكب وعبّأوا الاماچن بالذهب (والملك ما عادش عند حق باش يتكلم)

هز مريّتو وركبوا في المراكب والثنية اللّي جابته تهزوه . وصلوا لبلاد بوه لقوا كيرسة تستنا فيهم . ركبت هي وهو ودادها . ماشين ماشين يخليوا بلاد ويعمروا بلاد وما يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد . خرجوا خارج البلاد يلقاوا قصر حلّ الباب السماء والطارق والرب الخالق . قصر لا ثم حتى بنادم ، مفروش بما عطاها ربي كل شئ . اما عباد ما ثماش . قال لها " لله كل شئ قدامك . القضية مقضية في الكوجينة كل شئ موجود " . دخلت داداها طيبتلهم العشاء . تعشاوا باتوا صبحوا قامت في الصباح كيف الناس الكل . تقضي في داويررتها كاينها ما هيش بنت سلطان .

برا... برا... حبلت . طلع عليها الشهر صحيح . ثلاثة وحم و ثلاثة شحم و ثلاثة يبسوا جلدة على عظم . وصلت للسابع كيف ما نقولوا بوقّ البواق قالوا قايمة حرب ولد السلطان هو اللي باش يقود المحلة . جاء ماشي هوقائد المحلة قال لها " لّة " .

قالت له " (خاطر كانوا يقولوا لّة وهي تقول سيدي) نعم سيدي " قال لها " انت شهرك الداخل على خير وعافية ان شاء الله ثم مراكبيرة تلقاها في اخر الزنقة وصيتها تجي ملي يدخل شهرك تبات حذاك كل ليلة وقت اللي ربي يعطي خيريه تقبلك اهوكة حلّ القجرات العنبر قيز.. الكتان.. القمرايا... " تفصل وتخيّط زهاز الصغير كملته . والرويجل ما هوش بحذاها .

هاك المرا الكبيرة كل ليلة تبات بحذاها . ليلة من الليالي ساعتها حضرت و شدها الحس طلقت طلقة جابت طفل قد الفلقة يقول للقمر انزل ولا خا ننزل . الطفل دبی حبی شد في الحيط و مشى . ولد الدنيا يكبر في عام و عامين و ولد الخرافة يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين . كيما نقولوا وصل عمره ثلاثة سنين . بوقّ البواق قالوا سيدي جاي ربح الحرب وروح منتصر .

جات دادا قالت للاتها " اعطيني سيدي الصغير نهزها لسيدي الكبير " قالت لها " الله يبارك " .

بدلت للوليد . زيننت له مشطت له ، لبست له بزونك مرصع بالديامنن . مدّته للخادم مشات بيه للمركب . تلقى الموزيكات تضرب والحفلات والبلاد مزينة سيدنا جاء منتصر . الناس الكل طلعت له يباركوا له الوزرة والحكومة . " اشكون هذا يا دادا . ولدي ؟ " .

قالت له " ولدك "

باسها من هالخد وهالخد . باسوه الوزراء و الامراء عمل هكة شدة من طوابقه ورماءه في قاع البحر . روحت دادا باش تهيل . داخله من الباب (حاشاك وحاشا قدرك) تندب وتسلت . والخرة مبدلة مزينة محمرة مدبغة كونيليتھا تطبق واقفة في بيب السقيفة الدخلانية تستنى سيد الشباب داخل . قالت لها " أشبيك "

قالت لها " راو سيدي الكبيرة رمى سيدي الصغيرة في البحر " صابرة متربية بالحشمة و الجعة قالت لها " اس كلمة لا ! سيدي ثلاث سنين غايب باش نعمل له شوشة . الولد ولده يعمل بيه اللي يحب " دخلت الوصيفة سكتت . دخل هو " عالسلامة مرحبا الحمد الله عليك اللي انتصرت " . فرحت بيه . لا ولدي وينه . لا أش عملت له . سكتت المغيبنة شئ كلمة لا . (مرا ! هذاكا مغرفتها أش هزت) . قعدوا مع بعضهم في الثبات والنبات حتى بعدها هي اربعة خمسة سنين عاودت حبلى مرة اخرى . ثلاثة وحم و ثلاثة شحم و ثلاثة يبسوا جلدة على عظم . الشهر الثامن عاود مشى للحرب مرة اخرى . جات هاك المرا الكبيرة تبات بحذاها حتى ليلة من الليالي طلقت طلقة جابت طفل قد الفلقة يقول للقمر انزل ولا خا ننزل . حبى . دى شد في الحيط و مشى ولد الدنيا يكبر ني هام و عامين و ولد الخرافة يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين ايا سيدي وصل كيف ما نقولوا عمره عامين كيما خوه بوق البواق قالوا سيدي جاء منتصر مرة اخرى . قالت لها الوصيفة " بالكش المرة الاولى صغير وما يعرفني الكبة خليني نهزله " قالت لها " هزه " بدلتله زيننت له كيما خوه خويم مرصع في صبعه طلعت للمركب باسوه الجماعة . باسه هو . " هذا ولدي يا دادا ؟ " قالت له " ولدك " هزه من طوابق ورماءه في قاع البحر . روحت الخادم مشوشة باش تموت . دخلت لها تلقاها كيف العادة تستنى في سيد الشباب . " أش بيك يا دادا " قالت لها " اس كلمة لا سيدي جاي من السفر باش نحيره نفرح بيه " . سكتت المغيبنة .

فرحت فيه كيف المرة الاخرى دهر مديدة وهي هي عاود . بعد خمسة والا ستة سنين حبلى مرة اخرى . ثلاثة وحم و ثلاثة شحم و ثلاثة يبسوا جلدة على عظم . هو عاود مشى للحرب جات هاك المرأة الكبيرة تبات بحذاها حتى طلقت طلقة جابت طفلة قد الفلقة تقول للقمر انزل والا خليني ننزل . الطفلة حبات دبات شدت في الحيط و مشات . ولد الدنيا يكبر في عام و عامين و لد الخرافة في كلمة و كلمتين . هي هي بعد عامين رجع من البحر منتصر . قالت لها " بالكش ما يحبش طفل يحب طفلة خليني نهزها له " . بدلت لها زيننت

لها لبستها تقليد عزيز وغالي وخرجتها هزتها له . " بنيتي يا دادا .
 قالت له " بنتك " . باسوها الجماعة باسها هو وشدها من طوابقها
 ورمها في البحر . روجت هاكا الوصيفة باش تموت قالت لها " قلت لك
 اسكت ما عادش تتكلم " . سكتت .
 قعدوا مع بعضهم ١٣ سنة كماله الثلثاش سنة كيما نقولوا وصلت
 عمرها اربعين قال لها " يا للة - باش نقول لك حاجة " .
 قالت له " انشاء الله خير " .
 قال لها " انت كبرت معادش تنجب وانا نحب الاولاد . انحبك تمشي
 تخطب لي " .
 قالت له " الله يبارك " .
 قال لها " اهوك كرؤسة على ذمتك وانت ودادا كل يوم تخرجوا اما ثم
 شرط " .
 قالت له " اشنوة " .
 قال لها " نحبك تهز مرايا معاك اللي باش تاخذ هالي تحط كيما نقول
 ١٨ سنة التالي اما هي خليقتك هي نفسها " .
 قالت له " باهي " .
 بادت تدور من دار الى دار اللي يقول لها اشكون تقول " راجلي " اللي
 يقول لها (حاشاك) " يكب سعدك ؛ واللي يقول لها " قلبك كليتو و
 خريتو والله ما نعملوها هالعملة " .
 كلات على راسها . عام بالعام وهي في هاك المعدل تخرج في الصباح
 ترجع في العشية سويقاتها تحرق وريسها يدور . كلات السطاكة حتى
 شبع .
 قالت له " الحال حال الله . هاو توّه عام وانا ننفتش ما لقيتش وحدة
 كيفي . اللي كيفي ما فماش . ثم الزينين وثمة الطوال وثمة القصار .
 اما كيفي ما فماش " .
 قال لها " اوك في قاع الزنقة الفلانية . ثم علي تسكن فيه امرأة كبيرة
 يقولوا عندها صبية جميلة امشى شوفها اذا تلقاها تشبهك اللي تشرط
 عليك المرأة الكبيرة اقبل . غير انها تشبهك برك " . قالت له " الله
 يبارك " .
 دقت على هاك العلي طلت عليها المرأة . قالت لها " يا ميمتي معموك
 الله خليني نشوف بنيتك " . قالت لها " تفضلي " .
 دخلت هي شافتها وهي تلقاها سبحان الخلاق فيما يخلق . فولة
 وتقسمت على اثنين . غير الديرنسة (difference) متع العمر .
 " يا ميمتي . طحت من السماء جيت في حجرك اعطيتها لي " . قالت لها
 " لشكون " .

قالت لها " لراجلي " قالت لها " ووه "
قالت لها " يفضلك شوف ساقي . شوف حالي - تبت وعييت ومعادش
نقدر . اللي تشرط حاضر باش كنسترو بالزمرد . وكنسترو بالياقوت
وكنسترو بالجوهروبالفضة "

قالت لها " الله يبارك " اللي نقول اله يبارك شهدت و قالت لها "
أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأن محمد رسول الله "
قال لها " آيا باهي . مرتة ملّي مشات وخطبت حلّ مرمة في الدار وبنا
اربعة بيوت متناضرين كيف كيف ..

بعد المرمة ، كساهم موبيليات ورودات كيف كيف وصل قريب العرس
قال لها " باش تحل وباش تبيل ؛ حكّت وبَلّت وعملت البقلوات
والحلاوي على كل نوع حركت حركة متاع تاعرس حتى ليلة العرس
ليلة العرس قال لها " انت باش تلبسني " لبسق بدل زين قال لها "
توة باش تمشي تجيب العروسة "

مشات جابت العروسة ودخلت للبيت .
قال لها " توة باش تحط يدك فوق رأسك وتزوزني "
قالت " الله يبارك "

وضعت يدها فوق رأسه ودخلته .

قال لها " باش تشربنا الشربات "

شربتهم الشربات . هي حطت تشربهم في الشربات و ثم حسكة بالشمع
تشعل و ثم الذراية (كان قبل ثم الذراية مطرزة يربطو بيها الشعر ،
يقربطوا بيها الشعر) وقتلي طبست باش بيدها وطفاتها وقالت له "
شوتلي جواجي وحرقتلي ذراري ولا عقل بعد الضرة ولا صبر إلا بعد
الكبدة "

قام باسها بين عينيها وقال لها " تربية و اخلاق عمرك ما هزيت صوتك
علي يرحم الجوف اللي تخبطت فيها " . (الشابة اللي صبرت بيتها
عمرت) . " اخرج للسقيفة "

خرجت للسقيفة ، تلقي ثلاثة شبان قال لها " ها ذمك اولادك وهذا
نسيبك وهاذيك بنتك وتوة تخرج تهز الكروسة وتمشي تجيب كناينك
بنات عم اولادها "

مشات جابت كناينها و امر بالعرس . سبعة ايام و سبعة ليالي لا من
ينفخ و لا من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان .

قال لها " توة عاد احنا نعرسوا بالمجد قبل راه ما كانش عرس " قال لها
" ا ما لا انا فرغت خزنة بابا وعبيت خزنة بوك ، الزين رايتة من اول
ليلة اما العقل والصبر باش نعرفهم . لا عقل إلا بعد الضرة ولا صبر إلا
بعد الكبدة " . وعاشوا في الثبات والنبات حتى ماتت و مات .

كان يا ما كان الله في كل مكان .

كان ثم سلطان و لا سلطان الا الله . عنده وزيره مقرب منه لا كلمة الا كلمته

(اوك السلاطين كانوا يجوا للوزرة مساكن ويقولوا لهم كل مرة يجو الى حاجة دبر يا وزير والا راسك يطير .

نهار هو قاعد وديما كل ذو نعمة فهو محسود عليها هاك الوزير عنده الاعداء والشتمات (كيف الناس الكل) جاوا ووشاوا للملك في راو عمل.. راو استغنى.. عباوا له قلبه عليه راوا داره احسن من دارك . كلمة الصباح و كلمة العشية ترد المسلمة يهودية . تعبى قلبه قال يلزمني ندبر على تنحية رأسه .

جا نهار قال له ايا يا وزير نخرجوا نتفسحوا . ركبوا في الكروسة وبدوا ماشين.. كما نقولوا في شيرة الحمديّة والا مرناق (ماوا ديمة جماعة البرا يبدوا يكركوا في التاي) يلقاوا جماعة يطيبوا في التاي مكشكشين شوية حطب وحاطين الكافتريّة تغلي بالماء . دار السلطان للوزير وقال له " قلي الماء ماذا يقول (الماء يغلي) "

قال له " هو الماء يتكلم ؟ "

قال له " يتكلم "

قال له " كيفاه "

قال له " هكة "

قال له " اوكة في يدك ثلاثة ايام . كماله ثلاثة ايام تجي تقول لي الماء هاذ االي يغلي آش يقول و الا (البعيدة) نلعب برأسك . "

روح الوزير للدار حزين رزين عزيه يقبل العزاء راسه مدنقس العين قلة و الحجر حلاب ولا حب و لا يتعشى ولا يأكل . دخل لبيته مهموم . بنته صغيرة عزيزة عليه وعزيز عليها دخلت له " يا بابا آش بيك ، يا بابا اسم الله عليك ، يا بابا رأسي فداك "

قال لها " يا بنيتي آش باش نقول لك نظن ساعتني قربت "

" يا بابا محصن مضمّن اسم الله عليك "

قال لها " السلطان يا لندرا اشكون دورّه عليّ هذا ما قال لي وهذا ما قال لي "

قالت له " هذا الي بيك "

قال لها " آش تجد أكثر ما بي - هو الماء يتكلم "

قالت له " ايه يتكلم "

قال لها " كيفاه "

قالت له " ارقد توة وتعشي والعب واضحك ضحكاتك و العب لعباتك و
غدوة ربي يقضي حاجتنا و حاجاتك نهار الثالث يوم توة نقول لك آش
نقول "

قعد نهيرين لا باس عليه زاهي يلعب و يضحك كيف العادة قام الصباح
ضحكوا لعبوا .قال لها " ايا لله آش يقول الماء "

قالت له " الماء يقول "

انا الماء جيت

من السماء صبيت

على الار استويت

عود اذا حيت بيه كويت

(الماء ما و يصب من السماء الشتاءتجي فوق الارض وتبدا تقرقب

تسقي الشجرة هي الي تولي حطب نار وكواتوا) .

الصباح صبح و اللي يصلي على النبي يربح . مشى للسلطان

قال له " آش عملت لي ؟ "

قال له " انا نسيت وقتها اما كيف خمنت تذكرت يقول :

انا الماء جيت

من السماء صبيت

على الارض استويت

عود اذا حيت بيه كويت

قال له " صبحّ ليك كيف منعت " .سكت

برابرا..برا... باقي قلبه معبّي عليه ما بردش يحسّ يقتله كيفاش

باش يعمل كيفاش يعمل .بعد نهيرين قال له " ايا نخرجوا ندوروا "

قال له " ايا "

مشاوا في حضبة فيها الرّخام يلقاو رخامة عجيبه عمرهم لا راو رخامة

كيف هاك الرخامة - لونها ابيض وغبرة و مرمار .

قال السلطان للكرارسي " اهبط هز هالرخامة حطها في الكروسة "

روحوا للقصر .

قال له " ياوزير "

قال لهو " نعم "

قال له " اسمع هاذي تهزها كماله ثلاثة ايام تجيب لي منها اربعين

كسوة للعسكر متاعي اذا ما جبتهمش نحيلك راسك "

روح الوزير لدارو حزين رزين العين قلة و الحجر حلاب . قال لبنيته
" اذا المرة الاخرى لقيت الحل . هوني ماثم حتى حل "
قالت له " شنوة "

قال لها " قال لك هالرخامة فصلها ٤٠ كسوة "

قالت له " هاذا الي بيك "

قال لها " اشنوة هذا الي بيك "

قالت له " اقعد على روحك اضحك ضحكاتك والعب لعباتك و غدوة ربي
يقضي حاجتنا و حاجاتك "

نهار ثاني يوم . قامت الصباح قالت له " بابا اعطيني الكروسة باش
نمشي ندولش "

قال لها " باهي "

الصباح صبح و اللي يصلي على النبي يربح . ركبت في الكريسة
كيما نقولو مشات لقليبية ، (الرمل متع قليبيا معروف خلقه ربي
كانه فضة جيد ارطب كعبة و اختها) هزت هندية مطرّوزة عبّاتها من
ها كالرمل غربلته وحطته جات وقالت له " اسمع امشي للسلطان قل
له " الكساوي راهم حاضرين مفصلين اما الحرج راني درت جميع
المناوات متاع تونس الاسواق الكل اليهود و المسلمين . الي نقول له
حضرلي حرج في ثلاثة ايام يقول لي ما نجمشي . بصفتك سلطان
وتحكم البلاد عيطلهم وقول لهم يحضروا الحرج " . قال لها " باهي "
هز الهندية مشى بيها للسلطان وقال له " يا سيدي راو الكساوي
مفصلين حاضرين اما رانا تعطلنا في حكاية الحرج . عيط للمناون
يهود و مسلمين "

اليهودي قال له " اشنوة يا شيدي يا خي يجي حرج من الرمل "

قال له " هو يجي كساوي من الرخام "

خرجوا وقال له " صحّة ليك كيف ربحت صحّة ليك "

براً يا زمان وايجا يا زمان باقي قلبه ما بردش نهار هما قاعدين في
القنارية وقال له " يا وزير نحبك كماله ثلاثة ايام نحبك تجيب لي
ماكلة لاهي طايبة على نار والصفرة جيبها على راس البقر وما
تتبزّعشي اذا ما تجيبش هالماكلة راو انا نلعبك برأسك "

قال له " الله يبارك "

روح لداره حزين رزين العين قلة و الحجر حلاب ، جات له عائشة كيف
العادة " اسم الله عليك يا بابا . أش بيك حزين راسي فدا راسك " قال
لها " ما نقلك خير " قال لها " المرة هانزي الهروب للربي الاجل حضر و
المنية قربت . نهار ثالث يوم ابيك باش يكون على ذمة روحه "

قال " يحب مأكلة ماهيش طايبة على نار يهزها له البقر و لا تتبزع و لا تتطفح "

قالت له " هذا اللي بيك . اضحك ضحكاتك و العب لعباتك و غدوة ربي يقضي حاجتنا و حاجاتك . اعطيني كروسة و زوايل و دادا معاي و كريطة و راني ماشية للهنشير "

قال لها " باهي "

الصباح صبح و الل يصلي على النبي يربح . مشات للهنشير .
استنات حتى سحت الغنم روحت من السروح اختارت الاعلاش اولاد
نهارين . ثلاثة اختارت منهم عشرين علوش ركبتهم في الكريطة قالت
لهم يعبوا لها ثلاثة كيما نقولوا والا اربعة شكاير جير صوآن و شكارا
بالجر يعملوهم مناصب و روحت .

نهار ثالث يوم جبدت الطواجن جدد قصت اللحم صنفتوا انواع و
اشكال . جات عملت المناصب جات في وسطهم عملت الجير والصولن ،
غطات المأكلة هاذيكة حطتها فوق المناصب و صبّت الماء الجير الصوان
يعمل ابّاخ و بصفته اللحم طري متاع ولد نهارين و ثلاثة غلوتين
طاب .

طابت المأكلة تحطت في سربيس Louis XV . قال لها الطياب " ها و
حضر اشكون باش يهزوا "

قالت له " هذا اللي بيك أقف في راس الزنقة وقّف أربعة من الناس
. انشدهم .

" قدّاش عمره و نهار آش تولد و احنا اليوم نهار آش و قدّاش في
الشهر وفانا عام ؟ اللي ما يعرفشي يجاوب جيبولهي هذاك بقرة " .
قال لها " باهي "

وقف في راس الزنقة (موش صعيّب باش تلمهم اربعة من الناس كيما
هكة) اللي متعدي الاولاني قال له " آش اسمك "

قال " عبد الله "

قال " الناس الكل اولاد الله "

قال " آش اسمك الحقّاني "

قال له " محمّد "

قال له " صلى الله عليه وسلّم "

قال " قدّاش عمرك "

قال له " ندري عليه ناي عمري اللي هو واكا هو "

قال له " عاماش تولدت "

قال له " آو . آو برّة ندري عليه ؟ "

قال له " احنا نهار اليوم "

قال له " يا خي انا صاحب شهرية باش ندرى عليه النهار "

قال له " قداش في الشهر "

قال له " وين ندرى عليه "

قال له " فانا عام "

قال له " ما ندريش "

في المشوار لهم اربعة من الناس . لهم هزهم . قال لها " ايا الله هاني جبتهم الاربعة بقرات اللي تحب عليهم "

قالت له " ايا حطّ الصفرة فوق رؤسهم ، غطاتها بناب حرير مطروز "

قالت له " برّ هزّه له "

أه قال له " هذا بقر "

قال له " انشدو قداش عمره عقوبة الله
انشدو احنا فانا عام عقوبة الله
انشدو احنا فانا نهار عقوبة الله
انشدو الشهر قداش فيه .. عقوبة الله "

قال له " هذا بقرة ولا موش بقرة ؟ "

قال له " بقرة . صحّ ليك "

ذاق الماكلة لقاهها بنّة لا عمرو صارت و لا عمرو ذاقها ما يعرفهاش ما طابتش على نار .

كلا حتى فنش بعد هذا قال له : " توّ تقول لي اشكون قاعد يدبّر عليك و لا سيف يلعبك برأسك . هذا كلام وذك " "

قال له " بالمنجد كان الكذب ينجّي ، الصدق أنجى و أنجى . عندي بنيتي هي اللي منعتني من الموت "

قال له " تعطيها ليشي " . قال له " نعطيها لك خديمة صباتك امّا حتى نشاورها روح للدار " قال لها . قالت له : " هذاك موش باش ياخذني . يعذبني باش يخرج منّي زيت الزيتون " "

قال لها : " ما تقول هالكلام "

قالت له " والله . منعتك من الموت وهو حبّ يقتلك باش ينتقم مني "

قال لها " اسم الله على بنيتي "

قالت له " خليني ناخذه . انا نعرف أش نعمل "

قال لها " ما نخافش عليك "

قالت له " على شرط . يعملني ممشى تحت القاعة من دارنا لدار السلطان وبيبان سكريتو " .

قال لها " الله يبارك " من وقت تسمات على السلطان . الخدامة بدات تخدم ممشى من البيت اللي تسكن فيها حتى لدار بوها . زوز مفاتح على قلبها . قعدت على روحها .

وصلت ليلة العرس بدلوالها . عملو لها ما يعملوا للعرائس . امر سبعة ايام وسبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ ولا من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان . مشات لدار العروس حطها في بيت السماء والطارق والرب الخالق . فيها كان كرسي وشباك .

جات على هاك الكرسي وقعدت قدام الشبيبك . جاء هو عند الاول يجيبلها خبزة ونقبة (اللي احنا نقول توة كسكروت كانو يقولو خبزة ونقبة) .

يمدها لها من الشباك . يقول لها " عائشة "

تقول هي " نعم سيدي "

يقول لها " اشني زينة البيت "

تقول له " أوتادها "

يقول لها " زينة الميدة "

تقول له " مغيرفاتها "

يقول لها " اشني زينة المرا "

تقول له " وليداتها "

يقول لها " (البعيدة) الثلاثة لا تراهم ولا تفرح بيهم . (البيت سقف وقاعة . الماكلة خبز ونقبة والعرس ما ثماش والاولاد منين باش تجيبهم)

هو يدور وهي تعمل هكة تترشق المفتاح في البيب تمشي لدار بوها تاكل وتغني تشطح تلعب تضحك مع وخياتها وتقوم قبل نصف ساعة تعرفه يجي تمشي تقعد على هاك الكرسي تستناه يجيبلها الخبزة والتقية يقول لها " عائشة اشني زينة البيت "

تقول " أوتادها "

يقول " اشني زينة الميدة "

تقول " مغيرفاتها "

يقول " اشني زينة المرا "

تقول له " اولادها "

يقول لها " الثلاثة لا تراهم ولا تفرح بيهم "

براً يا زمان وايجا يا زمان كيما نقولو أربعة سنين وهما في هاك المعدل . نهار جاها وقال لها " يا عائشة "

قالت له " نعم "
 قال لها " راني ماشي في نزهة "
 قالت له " فين تسافر خير و عافية "
 قال لها " ماشي كيف ما نقولو ماشي لصفاقس آش توصّي "
 قالت له " قدك وسلامتك وبوسة من عمامتك . نوصيك عندي أختي
 تسكن في صفاقس تشبهلي تشبهلي ، فولة و تقسمت على اثنين . سلّم
 لي عليها "
 قال لها " هذا اللي في بالك "
 قالت له " اكاهو "
 قال لها " الله يبارك "
 ايا كيما نقولو السلطان باش يسافر الصباح ، رجعت هي لدار بوها .
 قالت له باش يجهز لها قافلة . جهز لها القافلة من العسكر والجيش
 قيطونات وبيوت القعاد ومونة وما لازمها .
 لبست عويشة لبسة راجل هو يمشي بالنهار . وهي تمشي بالنهار و
 الليل تخلي بلاد و تعمّر بلاد و لا يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد . وصلت
 لصفاقس قبل نهارين . جات في البطحة المقابلة وين باش ينصب
 السلطان ونصبت جيشها وعسكرها وبيوت الشعر و الخيمة متاعها
 وما لازمها الكل .
 نهار اللي وصل السلطان في السماء والماء دخلت لبست كسوة بالعدس
 لبست من الذهب حتى صفارت من الزمرد حتى خضارت وعملت
 ماكياج متاع بكري كحل وسواك وباروق وحرقوس ريحته تشق الخشم
 وحتى كنبابي في وسط الخيمة وجات وقعدت وخيمة السلطان مقابلتها
 رمى عينه يلقي سبحانه الخلاق فيما يخلق زين لا عمره راه في حياته
 تقول للقمر ازرق والآ خليني نزرّق . (الرجال ماهم ريقتم سائلة) .
 كيفاش يعمل يحب يشوفها جاء للوزير (ما وديمة الوزير رأس الهم)
 وقال له " دبّر عليّ نحبّ نبات بحذاها الليلة نحب نبات بحذاها
 ابعثولها مرسول "
 قال لها " يسلم عليك سيد السلطان قال يحب يبات بحذاك "
 قالت له " مرحبا بيه يجي اما على شرط . يلبس البدن ، الساق حافية
 والرأس العريان يبيع الفول المملّح للعسكر متاعي . كيف يكملّ يجي
 .يجي مرحبا بيه "
 قال لها " الله يبارك "
 مشى للسلطان قال له " قالتلك الله يبارك اما الشرط صعيّب ياسر "
 قال له " شنوّة "

قال له " هكة ما قالت وهكة ما قالت "

قال له " آه الكلبة بنت الكلب أنا سلطان نمشي الساق الحافية و
الراس العريان نلبس بدن ونبيع الفول المملح "

قال له " انت كلام في بلاد لا تعرفك يا سيدي هاك خارج بلادك آش
عندك فيها باش تعمل كيفك وتعدّي وقيت ما يعرفوكش مجهول هوني "

قال له " والله قلت الحق . آش جرالوا . اعملو لي طرف فول مملّح
وحطوا لي في طبق وخليني نمشي نبيع "

لبس بدن رأسه عريان وساقوا حافية وحط الطبيق فوق رأسه وبد
يبيع لهلك العسكر يضحكو عليه وعاملينو كراكوز واياه تكتب .
ايا كملّ الطبيق . دخلل للخيمة متاعه . بدل وزين ومشي لها بات
بحذاها (هو حلال عليها . صداقها مكتوب)

قالت له " قول ريته وبت في تركينة بيتها "

قال لها " اشني الامارة "

قالت له " قطعة صياغة "

قال لها " الله يبارك . مدلها بزونك مرصع بالديامنت . حطت في
شونها . قعد جمعة والا عشرة ايام . قال مروح ، هو لمّ قشّه وقصد
الثنية وهي قصدت ربي .

هو يمشي في النهار و يرتّج في الليل .

وهي تمشي في النهار والليل . وصلت قبله لبلادها .

دخلت لدار بوها لعبت ضحكت كلات شربت ، النهار الموعد اللي باش
يجي فيه جات في الوقيت كيما نقولو في نصف نهار صلات الظهر
جات لل الكريسي وقعدت جابلها هاك الخبزة و النقبة .

"عالسلامة يا سيدي ريتشي أختي"

قال لها " ريتها وتسلم عليك بسلام حار "

قالت له " يعيشك يفضلك لا ينحيك عليّ "

مشى على روجو . كل يوم يجيها "عائشة اشني زينة البيت "

تقول له " أوتادها "

يقول لها " اشني زينة الميدة "

تقول له " مغيرقاتها "

يقول لها " اشني زينة المرا "

تقول له " وليداتها "

يقول لها " الثلاثة لا تراهم ولا تفرح بيهم "

علاش موش هي الشهير طلع عليها صحيح ، شهير شهير والآخر
مقطوع الظهير ثلاثة لحم و ثلاثة شحم و ثلاثة يبسوا جلدة علي عظم .
دخل شهرها . تطلق طلفة تجيب طفل قد الفلقة يقول للقمر انزل والا
خليني ننزل . في دار بوها جات المرضعة وفات المرضعة ، جات
الرباية وفات الرباية جاء المدب وفا المدب جاء المعلم . الطفل حبي دبي
شد في الحيط و مشي . ولد الدنيا يكبر في عام وعامين وولد الخرافة
يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين كبرها الوليد . جاها السلطان كيف العادة من
النقبة وقال لها " عائشة "

قالت له " نعم "

قال لها " مسافر "

قالت له " امشي سيدي على خير وعافية "

قال لها " كيف ما نقولو ماشي لبنزرت "

قال لها " توصيشي حاجة "

قالت له " قدك وسلامتك وبوسة من عمامتك ، عندي أختي في بنزرت

عندي سنين ماريتهاش حرقني وحشها "

قال لها " الله يبارك "

عملت كيف عملت المرة الاولى . هو هز القافلة متاعه . هو يمشي في
النهار ويرتاح في الليل . وهي تمشي بالليل والنهار . تخلي بلاد و
تعمر بلاد و ها يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد . وصلت قبله ، نصبت
خيمتها خلط هو هي هي حطّ النصبه متاعه . بدلت وزينت كما العادة
خزر يلقي سبحان الخلاق فيما يخلق تقول للقمر انزل والا خليني
ننزل . جاته الحملة متاع الرجال . كيفاش باش يعمل باش يوصل لها ،
بعث لها مرسول . مشى لها .

قالت له " مرحبا بيه اما على شرط "

قال لها " شنوة الشرط "

قالت له " الشرط يبيع الفطائر للجيش متاعي ، يحط طبق فطائر

بالعسل ويبيع للعسكر متاعي الساق الحافية والرأس العريان "

مشى له قال له .

" آه الكلبة بنت الكلب انا نبيع الفطائر "

قال له " هذا الشرط . انت آش عندك فيها بلاد الناس آش جرالو

تلاقوا بلاد لا تعرف عمل هكة "

فما فطائري امتع السلطان (ماوكل شئ يبدا معاه) عمل معه الفطائر

شحر لهم وحطهم له في طبق وخرج يدور يبيع في الفطائر . الساق

الحافية و الرأس العريان . باع هاك الفطائر ومشى بات حذاها .

في الصباح قالت له " قول ريتها وبنت في تركينة بيتها "
قال لها " اشني الامارة "
قالت له " قطعة صياغة "

عطاها تقليد كل ديامنت واحجار مثمينة وفيه اسمه وروح .
عويشة رocht هي كما المرة الاول ، وصلت قبله مشات لدارهم قعدت
ثلاثة ايام اليوم الموعود مشات لك البيت المحنونة ، حلت الباب . جاء
هو
" عالسلامة "

" يسلمك . الحمد على سلامتك ، سيدي سفرة ميمونة . الحمد لله عليك
لباس "

قالت له " شنوة احوال اختي "
قال لها " راهي تسلم عليك . قالت لك توحشتك برشة "
قالت له " انا زادة " . بكت نزلت دمعتين .

قال لها " عائشة اشني زينة البيت "
تقول له " أوتادها "

يقول لها " اشني زينة الميدة "

تقول له " مغيرفاتها "

يقول لها " اشني زينة المرا "

تقول له " وليداتها "

يقول لها " الثلاثة لا تراهم ولا تفرح بيهم "

علاش موش هي الشهر طلع عليها صحيح ، شهير شهير ولاخر
مقطوع الظهير . دخل شهرها . تطلق طلقة تجيب طفل قد الفلقة .
يقول للقمر انزل والا خليني ننزل . في دار بوها جات المرضعة وفات
المرضعة ، جات الرباية وفات الرباية جاء المدب وفا المدب جاء المعلم
الطفل حبي دبي شد في الحيط و مشي . ولد الدنيا يكبر في عام
وعامين وولد الخرافة يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين كبرها الوليد .

ولات تمشي لا كالشباك يعاود لها هاك الكلام وهي تعاود هاك الكلام
وصل الوليد عمره ثلاث سنوات جاء قال لها " راني مسافر ماشي
للقيروان . أش توصي "

قالت له " اقرأ لي فاتحة عند سيدي العجبي عنده بركة عظيمة .
وعندي أختي غادي سلم عليها . "

هو مشي مع القافلة متاعه . وهي عملت القافلة متاعها تخلي بلاد و
تعمر بلاد و ما يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد وصلت للقيروان

قالت لهم " وين باش ينصب السلطان ؟"
قالوا لها كيما نقولوا في البقعة الفلانية .نصبت خيمتها ولبست
،زينت وقعدت تشتنى قمرة متع ليلة الاربعة عشرة.
سيد الاميمة ما طاقه صبر آش باش بعثلها الرقاص قال لها : " سيدي
السلطان يحب يبات بحذاك الليلة "
قالت له " على شرط يبيع الحمص المقلي للعسكر متاعي الساق
الحافية والرأس العريان "
آكا هو عمل طبق فول وحمص . ها و الفول والحمص قرمش ، قرمش
حتى كمل ها الطبق وهك العسكر يضحكوا ويضربوا فيه بالحمص
وهو كيف الكراكوز في ايامه.
جاء بات بحذاها في الصباح قالت له " قول ريتها وبست في تركينة
بيتها "

قال " اشني الامارة "
قالت له " اعطني قطعة صياغة "
عطاها خاتم مرصع بالديمانت. حطته في أصبعها وقعدت على روحها .
هو روح وهي رocht سبقت كيف العادة . طلع عليها الشهرير صحيح
كيف العادة ثلاثة لحم و ثلاثة شحم و ثلاثة يابسوا جادة على عظم.
طلقت طلبة تجيب طفلة قد الفلقة قطعة ،(امها شابة وبوها سلطان
آش باش تجي عجة) حبات دبات شدت في الحيط ومشات صغير
الدنيا يكبر في عام وعامين وصغير الخرافة يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين .
وصلت ثلاثة سنين ، كبروا الوليدات مع بعضهم . قالوا السلطان باش
يعرس خذا بنت عمّو . سكتت هي يجيها هو من الشباك
قال لها " باش راني باش نعرّس "

قالت له " ان شاء الله مبروكة مسعودة عليك "
قالوا وقتاش باش يحيبوا الفرش ؟ قالوا كيف ما نقولوا نهار
الخميس .

نهار هزان الفرش تبدل للاولاد البزونك والخاتم الطفلة التقليد . جات
لدادا وقالت لها " هزهم لدار العروسة" ووصّات الاولاد " الصرميات
عملهم حصنة يلحس الجير) (هما الصغار من غير ما اتوصيهم) يعملوه
يعملوه وزيد موصيين . اذا واحد كلمكم قولوا الدار دار بونا والناس
يعاركونا "

مشاواك الثلاثة غشاشر مع داداهم ، دخلوا الدار العروسة هدوه
الفرشاصحنة و كيسان جدد، مك . السرابسلاوي كنز ،
سربيسكريسطلال خمسين قطعة ، الدوزان ، مققول و كسكاس طناجر

و كراون ، فروشات مطروزة غرزة نابل و غرزة فلور دو لي، مقربطة
بالقرايط الغبرة ، ريدوات حرير و صرميات...حاصلو...الوليدات
عملوا كم وصاوهم . كسروا الصحنون و الكيسان ، هاك الصرميات
المطروزة عاملينها حصنة هي بو هي ابوك الي يجي يكلمهم يقولوا "
الدار دار بونا والناس يعاركونا "

قامت ام العروسة قالت " عيطولي العروس آش هالغلبة هاذي غلبة
كبيرة ، جنون مسيبة والي يكلمهم يقولوا الدار دار بونا والناس
يعاركونا "

عيطت " محمد ايجي طل آش عملت من عملة "

قال لها " اشني هالعملة "

قالت له " ثلاثة جنون مسيبين ، وناس العروسة مغششين لا خلاو
سرابس ولا خلاو دبابز كلونيا ولاخلو فروشات مطروزة الدنيا هدوها "

قال لها " ترا جيبهم لي "

جابتهم له يلقي الخاتم والبزونك والتقليد قال " عندي ما عند حد هاذي
عائشة عملتها في " . مشى لها يجري لاك البيت المحنونة يلقاها قاعدة
قال لها : " هكة عملتها في "

قالت له " مالا ما ريتينيش كيفاش منعت بابا . باش تنجمني انت . "

قال لها " اشنوة الحل توة كيفاك "

قالت له " الحل امشي لعمك وقول له يا عمي عندي خزنة وعندي
مفتاح نحب الخزنة هاذي المفتاح متاعها راح . مشيت نطلع في مفتاح
فضة أنا نطلع في المفتاح الجديد ونلقي المفتاح القديم آش نعمل توة
اتشوف ايش يجاوبك "

قال لها " باهي "

مشي لاب العروسة وحكى له على هاك المفتاح متع الخزنة ، قال له " انا
نطلع في المفتاح الحديد ، نلقي المفتاح القديم آش يلزمني نعمل "

قال له " كيف لقيته المفتاح القديم علاش تطلع في واحد حديد "

قال له " ما لا يا عمي خلي بنيتك عندك راني لقيت مرتي "

هاك العرس ولى لها ليها على خاطر هي لا فرحت ولا رات . سبعة ايام
و سبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ و لا من يطبخ مان في دار السلطان .

ودورت اولادها بيها

وعاشوا في الثبات و النبات حتى ماتت و مات .

كان يا ما كان الله في كل مكان

كان ثمة تاجر كبير عنده طفلة وطفل . الطفلة اكبر . نهار من
النهارات مرض شعر المریضة الاخرانية نادى بنته قال لها " يا عويشة
ظاهر لي المنية قربت وهاذيك حد العشرة "
قالت له " اللطف عليك يا بابا رأسي فداك "
قال لها " عندي وصية . نوصيك على خوك (خوها الصغير) "
اهوك الحوانت و خابية مليانة باللويز، قال لها " هذي ما توريه حتى
تحس بيه ولى راجل "
قالت له " الله يبارك "
المنية حضرت ، صاحب الامانة اخذ امانته وصلته لبقيعته وقعدت هي
وخياها صغير تكبر فيه .

برا...برا..برا... وصل عمره كيما نقولوا سبعة سنين جاءته وقالت له
" يا خويا " قال لها " نعم "
قالت له " اذا نمشي لجارتنا نتسلفك مئة ريال آش تعمل بيهم "
قال لها " نشري زربوط ونشري كرة ونشري دبش لعب "
قالت لروحها " خوي ما زال صغير "
ولا كيف ما نقول عمره ١٤ سنة عاودت له " يا خويا ، كان نعطيك
ميات ريال آش تعمل بيهم "
قال لها " نشري بسكلات "
قالت لروحها " خويا ما زال صغير "
ولى عمره ١٨ سنة وعاودت قالت له " لو كان نعطيك ١٠٠ ريال آش
تعمل بيهم ؟ "
قال لها " نحل حوانت بابا ونجبد السلعة الفاسدة نلوح واللي يصلح
نخرجه نبيعه ونمشي للتجار الكبار اللي عاشروا بابا يوريوني الخدمة "
قالت " خويا كبر توة ، غدوة نمشي نتسلفك ١٠٠ ريال من عند خالتي
فلانة وكيف تصور رجعم لمولاتهم "
قال لها " باهي كون متهنية "

هو خرج وهي مشات لهالك القليلة المليانة باللويز وجبدت قيمة ميات ريال وسكرت وقعدت . هو جاء وهي مدتهم له مشى للسوق .بوه كان تاجر كبير حل الاحوانت ثلاثة واربعة القرمسود الطففة الحرير ، لوح اللي لوح وسمش اللي سمش ، والاخرين حطهم للبيع .

مشى لصاحب بوه وقال له علمني الصنعة . قال له " هذا النهار الزين هذا النهار المبروك اللي خلى الخليفة ما ماتشي هذا النهار السعيد " .

دهر مديدة وهو يشاطي ويباطي في هاك السوق وعمل صنّاع تحت منّه . رجّع الفلوس لاخته .

نهار هو قاعد تعدّي واحد يبيع في عصفور يغني ويخرف ويحكي . قال " والله الاّ ما نشره لاختي هي وحيدة براسها خليه يونسها " .

اشراه واشرى له قفص ذهب . عباً وحدة بالزوال والاخرى بماء الورد .

وقعد علاش موش هاك العصفور يتكلم . كل يوم تقوم في الصباح تقضي قضيتها وتحط الكرسي لهاك العصفور يخرفلها يوسعها بالها وهي عصفوري عصفوري .

نهار من النهارات جاوا جماعة السوق قالوا باش يمشوا يتاجروا . كانوا كيف يتاجروا يبقاوا عام) . قال لهم هو " نمشي معاكم " مشى قال لاخته .

قالت له " يا خويا لشكون باش تخليني انا وحدانية ما نكساب حد . يا غريب لك الله "

قال لها " الله غالب هذيك خبزتي هاو عندك العصفور يونسك "

قالت له " الله يبارك ربي يوجهك خير "

عملت له زاده وزواده وما يقر قلبه وافاده باسها وعنقها بكات ومشى .

هو مشى وهي قعدت هي والعصفور متاعها . وصلوا كما نقولوا لبغداد .

في النهار يشيروا وفي الليل يتلموا في مجلس ولا نادي يلعبوا الكارطة ، لعبوا الشطرنج ، لعبوا الدمينو . قاموا يتكلموا على الدين متاع النساء قال واحد منهم " انا مرتي او كان من يبوس عينيه حد ما يراش ظفرها . " قام واحد اخر قال " واحد ينجم يوصل للسماء وما ينجمش يوصل لاختي "

قام هو قال " الكلّم فيها ومما فيها وباش ثمة وحدة دينة و عفيفة كيف أختي امر من المستحيل " . واحد من التجار الصغار قال له " أش تولّي هاذي نتخاطروا "

قال له " نتخاطروا . هيا نلعبوا طرح كارطة " . لعبوا طرح كارطة خسر

قال له " عندها شى امارة في بدنها "

قال له " عندها "

قال له " وكيف نجيب لك الامارة متاعها "

قال له " اعمل اللي تحب "

قال له " تولي مملوك عندي ورزقك الكل متاعي وتولي ما تكسب حتى شى "

قال له " الله يبارك "

خذا مركب ومشى لعجوزة ستوت لا يرحمها نهار اللي تموت قال لها " عندي ما عند حد راو هكة وهكة وعامل خطار كبير ياسر اما هو يولي مملوك عندي ولا نولي مملوك عنده "

قالت له " هذا اللي بيك . اسهل منها ما ثماش ، انعتني على الدار وتوة نوريك "

مشات لبست قمجة خضراء وشان اخضر فوق رأسها ودهنت عكازها اخضر ومشات للطفلة ، دقت الباب قالت لها " اشكون " قالت لها " خالتك "

قالت لها " عجب عمري ما سمعت روعي عندي خالتي "

قالت لها " لو كان نحكي لك ماوا المرحوم بوك كان قاطعني من اوختي ولا نراها ولا تراني ، والله يسامح في فعله ، هوتوة في دار الحق واحنا في دار الباطل وانا سامحته "

وبدأت تبكي وتشخم . أمنتها الاخرى وحلت لها الباب دخلتها ، قعدت فطرت شربت الشاي ولات نهار بعد نهار تطل عليها .

جاتها نهار قالت لها كما نقولوا " ليلة الخميس عندي الحنة متع بنتي وقالت ما تحط الحنة في صبعها الا ما تكون بنت خالتها بحذاها ، احنا مقطوعين حياتنا كاملة والحمد لله يا ربي يلم شملنا "

قالت لها " يا خالتي راني ما نخرجش خويا غايب "

قالت لها " يا بنيتي بنت خالتك قالت شى ما يصير ، تحب تقطعها فرحتها "

قالت لها " مليح "

مشات جبدت عندها الخيرات السبعة ، جبدت سفساري حرير من قرطاس ، نفطته ، تلحفت بيه ، هي جات خارجة والعصفور قال لها

"للة"

قالت له " نعم "

قال لها " ردّ الحريير في مسيراته والذهب في حكيكاته وايجا نحكي لك على قاسم وقويسم ومغيرفاته "

قالت لها " هذا وقته "

قالت لها " لا توة باش نسمع خرافة عصفوري "

قالت لها " يكب سعده ، يكب ايامه "

قالت لها " لا يكب سعده ولا ايامه ، يلزمني نسمع عصفوري "

خرجت العجوزة والاخرى حطت كرسي وقعدت تسمع .

قال لها " كان ثمة بشامقي نهار جاء السلطان قال لها " نحب تحضرلي

١٠٠ بشمق في الصباح تلقاهم مخيطين . "

سكر الحانوت على روحه وبدا يبكي كيفاش باش يخيط ها ١٠٠ بشمق

. هو يبكي والحيط تشق . خرجت له هالصبية تقول للقمر انزل ولا

خلينا ننزل .

قالت يا خويا " السلام عليكم "

قال لها " وعليكم السلام "

قال لها " انس والّا جان "

قالت له " جان "

قال لها " أش تحب "

" اعطيني عشاك " (اوك هما جابوا له عشا)

عطاها . قالت له " اضحك ضحكاتك و اللعب لعباتك و غدوة ربي يقضي

حاحتنا و حاجاتك . ارقد على روحك غدوة الصباح تلقي البشامق الكل

مخيطين "

قال لها " خو بالشفاء نتهنى "

قالت له " اتهنى "

عطاها عشا ورقد . الصباح يلقي هاك الميات بشمق مخيطين حاضرين

(هي جابت الجنون معاه خيطوا) ولّى يشرى كل يوم فطيرة تجي هاك

الجنية تاكلها وتخلي له كعبة لويز تخيط له البشامق الكل . ولّت

السلعة داخله خارجة استغنى هاك البشامقي و زهات له الايام . بدل

الخربة متاعه كساها كان عنده بنات عرس اليهم والاولاد خدمهم معاه

ولّى في خيار الخير . نهار من النهارات واحد من صحابه قال له "

ما تقلناش هالخير منين "

قال له " من عند الله - هاك وهاك وهاك "

قال له " فك عليك شنوة هاذي تاكلك من قوتك الي ياكلك في قوتك عاملك على موتك "

الصباح شق شعرة وهي جات . هو حط الفطيرة ، هي جات باش تهزها تاكلها وهو ضربها على يدها .

هو ضربها وهي قالت له " راك تندم يا قاسم " . رجعت تسكر عليها الحيط . قعد شهر وهو يستنى . هاك كعبة اللويز معادش عاد توة تجي توة تجي ، خسر خيريه الكل و دارت عليه الايام . قالها " شد زوز حجرات بدا يضرب في راسه يضرب في راسه حتى طاح مات بالندم .

يا للة تخرج من دارك هكة يجراك "

قالت " لا ياخويا لاني خارجة ولاني ماشية " . رجعت هاك العجوزة للراجل على الفرس يستنى فيها باش يهرب بالطفلة .

قالت له " هاذي حاجة ما نجمتهاش . أش قالك هو ؟ "

قال لها " قال لي عندها امارة في بدننا "

قالت له " اقعد توة نجيبك الامارة "

جاتها نهار في قاتلة حنانية وقالت لها " شعرك تمسخ ايجا نغسلك ما تلقاش اشكون يحكلك ضهرك ويصب عليك الماء ، هيا نغسل لبنيت اختي وننقذ لك حالك وامك ميتة خليني في عوض امك " . ونزلت لها دمعتين .

قالت لها " باهي "

حطت سخنت الماء دخلوا للكوجينة ، نحات حوايجها رمات عينيها تلقى برج دلاع البراني أخضر والوسطاني أحمر والقلوب كحل ، شهوة في فخذها . هي شافته وهي قالت لها " استني وقالت العرب رحلوا "

خرجت تجري للفارس .

كملت غسلت لوجت على المرا مالقتهاش . قالها العصفور " يا ناري عليك "

رجعت العجوزة للفارس يستنى فيها " قالت له " راه برج دلاع هكة وهكة وهكة "

رجع هاك الفارس للبلاد اللي فيها خوها يلقيه قالو " ايا يا سيدي هاذي اختك الدينة العفيفة هاذي امارة في فخذها برج دلاع هكة كبره .

من اليوم انت مملوك متاعي "

حل حانوت متع فطايري حزمه بالشكارة وخلّاه يقلّي في الفطائر
الساق الحافية والراس العريان . هي قاعدة والعصفور قال لها " للة "
قالت له " نعم "

قال لها " تعرف سيدي آش يعمل توة "
قالت له " وين تعرف "

قال لها " يقلّي في الفطائر وراه مملوك " . حكى لها الحكاية من اولها
الى اخرها .

قالت " عندي ما عند حد . مشات خذات كسوة متاع راجل ، وحضرت
زادها وزوادها وما يقرأ على قلبها وافادها ودارت لعصفورها قالت
له " توصيش حاجة "

قال لها " يا للة كيف تبادو مروحين راو في البحر الاحمر ثمّ عصفور
ولد عمّي عيط له ثلاث مرات قل له :

مرجان يا مرجان يسلم عليك ياقوت
قال لك آش الخلاص من الاقفاص
وأش خروجي من بلاد الناس

قال لها " الجواب الي يعطيه لك قول هولي . هذي المزية الي تعملها
علي "

قالت له " علي راسي وعيني نخلّص خويا ونقضيلك قضيتك "
عملت النقاب و ركبت في المركب ، وصلت لهاك البلاد هاذيك تلقى
خوها مملوك يقلّي في الفطائر . سألتها حكا لها . قالت له " انا متاع
اللي باش يتمكنوا عليها الرجال ، انا بنت امي راو صار وصار وحكات
له على عجوزة الستوت لعبت بيّ وعطت الامارة . حلّ الملكية اللي
كانت ما بيناتهم خلصت خوها . ركبوا وجاو مروحين وصلوا للبقعة
اللي قال لها عليها العصفور عيطت :

مرجان يا مرجان يسلم عليك ياقوت
قال لك آش الخلاص من الاقفاص
وأش خروجي من بلاد الناس
جاوبها قال لها :

هذا الكل بيك بهــــــــــــــــوت
اضرب راسك على الحيط موت
قالت له " باهي "

رجعوا للدار فرح بيهم العصفور . حكات لخواها على العصفور ولا الاعز
الاعز الله. قعدوا كلاو وتنهنهوا شربوا التاي قال لها العصفور "
يالندرا قضيتليشي قضيتي؟"
قالت له " مالة "
قال لها " أش قالك "
قالت له :

هذا الكل بيك بهــــــــــــــــوت
اضرب راسك على الحيط موت"
رقدوا . في الصباح قامت تلقي العصفور ميّت وحالته حليلة .
بدات تبكي وتصيح " يا عصفوري اللي ونسني اللي يغني لي اللي
يدبر عليّ ". قام خواها قال لها " شنية هالبنقة على عصفور (موا
الرجال ما يحبوش الهم) توة نشريلك عصفور اخر " . حل الباب
القفص هز من جناحه ورماه على الزبلة . هو رماه على الزبلة وهو
عمل فر فر جاء فوق القافون . جاها وقال لها " للة . هاني "
قالت له " عصفوري يا عصفوري ما ماتش ارجع
لي "

قال لها " انا هذيك الوصاية اللي وصيتك عليها انا حريتني نلوج عليها
وتوة كيف لقيتها باش نرجع ؟ غاضني سيدي كان اللي قالك توة
نشريلك عصفور آخر " وحلق طار .

خرافتنا هابا هابا والعام الجاي تجينا صابة ..

كان اله في كل مكان

ثم تاجر هاك التاجر هاذاكا خذا امرا خذا اتها له امه . (ناس قبل كانوا يحشموا ما يتكلموش قدام الحما والحمو الحماوات كانوا يحكموا) خذات له مرا . عرس . العروسة ما زالت جديدة . عندها هي زوز بنات لوزات آش يعملوا حموها لا باس عليه يجيب القضية تدخل الحما وبناتها يطيبوا تقص اللحم تشويه لبناتها. الحاجة الباهية تعطيها لبناتها ديمها هاذيك الصنعة يحطوا العشاء والفطور (كانوا يفتروا ويتعشاوا وحدهم النساء) "قوم جيب هاك الحاجة" تحشم تقوم يرغبوا هما ياكلوا. هي تجي تاكل وهما يقولوا لها "اشبعنا احنا وقطوستنا وانت يا عروستنا"

تحشم تقول "شبعنا الحمد لله"

وتقوم المرا . شيانا ولات خيال وصفارت.

تقول له "سكت كنتك" يسكت..

لامرا عمال تضعاف وتشيان ولا جبدت لراجلها لا حتى شيء . نهار من النهارات قاعد يخمم "المرا لا تضحك لا تتكلم. لا تبات حذايا لا حتى شيء تطلع الفرش وترقد". قاعد يخمم ... جاء صاحبه تاجر كيفه "اش بيك" قال له والله شيء ما بي اما المرا متاعي لا تلعب لا تضحك لا حتى شيء من عند المغرب ترقد"

قال له "جيعانه"

قال له "كيفاش جيعانة ما تقول ها الكلام ... انا نشري ونكركر وانت تقول جيعانة!"

قال له "تحبش تجر بها؟"

قال "باهي"

"برا خوذ سردوك ريشه الكله وما تخلي فيه كان ريشة واطلع للسطح وارميه وما توريش وجهك. كاني شبعانة توا تخرج تضحك على العجب وكاني جيعانة من بيتها ما تخرجش"

مشى شري سردوك ريشه طلع للسطح بالسرقة رومي السردوك. خرجت امه واخوته "يا امي شوف ها العجب"

هي من بيتها ما خرجتش. قال "بالمنجد كما قال صاحبي جيعانة"

مشى للسوق . قال له "كلمتك صحيحة جيعانة"

قال له "شكاتلكشي؟"
قال ل"ا عمرها ما شكات لي ولا قالت لي كلمة"
قال له "بر اشري كما تقول طرف قاطو. دخله بالسرقه واحلف عليها
ووكله لها توا هي كيف تشبع تتفكر السردوك وتضحك عليه"
مشى شري طرف قاطو دخله تحت منه (كانوا بالبرانس والجبايب) هي
راقدة وهو قيمها فلانه"
قالت له خليني راسي يوجع فيا"
هما هاذيك صنعتهم ياكلوا الماكلة الكل هما ويخليوها هي بلاش هي
تجيي تاكل وهما يقولوا اشبعنا احنا وقطوستنا وانت يا عروستنا
"تقول لهم الحمد لله شبعت".
ايا قال لها "خوذ"
قالت "شنوا؟"
قال "قاطو باليمين الما تاكل"
كلات تقنعت. هي قاعدة وهي ضحكت
قال لها "أش بيك تضحك؟"
قالت له ل"اشيء تفكرت حاجة"
قال لها "والله الا ما تقول لي علاش تضحك"
قالت له "نضحك على هاك السردوك الى بلاشر ريش"
قال لها "توا باش تقول بي الي صائر"
قالت له "ما عندي ما نقول"
قال لها "لازم تقول لي"
قالت "راني جيعانة ... مانيش قاعدة ناكل .. راهم هك صورة وهك
صورة. مد هاك الحلاب مد هاك الحاجة ما ناكلش نحشم"
قال لها "انت مررتي وانا مانيش مطلقك (عزت بيه اللي ما شكاتش)
توا باش نهزك لدار بوك .. نعملوا رواحنا تعاركننا ونحلف عليك تبات
في دار بوك هز الحوايج الكل باش نخلصك"
حكى لبوها وقال له "راني باش نربي دارنا".
قام الصباح "فلانة" بدى يتعوج عليها من كلمة لكلمة قال "بهاك
اليمين ماكش قاعدة هز حوائجك واخرج".
جاب الكميونا عبات حوائجها ومشات لدارهم .
مشات لدارهم يبعث قضيته عزيزة غالية. تطيب تاكل شبعت المرا
وتنعنعت في دار بوها.
امه يا وليدي خوذ مرا... خوذ مرا.
قال لها "ناخذ مرا اللي نحبها انا"
ثم وحده مهبوله اسمها فطيطة . قال لها "باش ناخذك اما راني

مانيش باش ناخذك نحبك تستنقم من دارنا برك"
قالت "حاضر"
ايا مشى قال لهم "باش بخطبوا لي"
قالوا شكون قال لهم "فطيطة بنت فلان"
دقوا الباب .
قالت لهم "شد في لحية النجار توا يوصلك باب الدار"
ما عرفوش روحوا للدار قالوا له "مشينا دقيننا"
قالت "شد في لحية النجار توا يوصلك باب الدار"
قالت "ثم خيط اجبدوه توا يتحل الباب"
من غدوة مشاوا. دقوا الباب. قالت لهم
"شد وا في لحية النجار توا يوصلكم باب الدار" جبدواها الخيط دخلوا.
"عاسلامة" "يسلمك وينى امك؟"
"مشات تخلص الروح من الروح"
"وينة بوك؟"
"مشى يوصل في اللي ما يرجع"
"وينه اخوك؟"
"مشى يحارب في اللي ما يحاربوا"
"هي قاعدة بصت وهما يغزروا لها داهشين!
قالت لهم "أش بيكم تغزروا البص من الرص والرص من المظمور
علاش مال بابا يبور؟"
هزوا روحهم وروحوا. قالت له "شني ها المرا اللي باش تاخذها"
قال لها "ماناخوا كان هي"
قالوا له سألناها على امها قالت مشات تخلص الروح من الروح. قال
"لهم هذيك مشات تقبل واللي مشى يوصل اللي ما يرجع مشى لدفينته
والاخ اللي مشى يحارب الي ما يحاربوا مشى يصطاد ". مشاوا
خطبوا كتبوا الصداق .. دخلت . قالت لهم "انا باش نطيب"
تجي القضية تاخذ اللحم تشرح وتشوي وتاكل يقعدوا يفطروا "قوم
جيب هاك الحاجة تقول لهم "قوموا انتما جيبوا"
تاكل هاك الماكلة الكل وتخليهم ولا وا عانشين بالشر.
"يا وليدي ها العملة اللي عملتها رجع مرتك"
"وينى مرتي مشات على روحها ما عادش ترجع ولا وا قالقين من الدار
قال "الما نشعفهم". حطوا وسكتوا قال لهم. "لو تشكيوا لي منها ما
نيش مطلقها ...
قالوا لها "باش نخط عشا حموك"
هو قاعد وهي جابت الشهود قالت لهم "باش تكتبوا لي الرزق

ونعطيكم صرة فلوس جات لعموها هو ياكل وهي قالت له استنى
سيدي شعره"

هو خرج لسانه وهي قصته له ولى أه . أه . أه . أه جابت الشهود وقالت
"اكتبوا الرزق الكل لولده "الراجل يقول..أ...أ...أ...أ... وهي تقول لهم
قاللكم" بايش نعطيكم صرة فلوس" . كتبوا هاك الشهود . خرجوا
قالوا "وين الصرة؟"

قالت "آخر جوا ما ثم فلوس"
جات المرا تلقى لسانه بالدم هابط وحالته حيلة.
قالت له "طلقها ورجع مرتك".
قال لها "ماكم عملتوا فيها"
قالت له " نمشيوا نبوسوا لها يديها وساقها ونرجوعها هي غير
تخرج علينا ها المهبولة من الدار"
قال لها ل "اقتلتوها بالشر ماعادش يرجعها بوها"
قالو له " احنا نمشيو نرجعوها"
طلقت الاخرى اكاهو.
مشاوا رجعوها ولات في زينها وفي صحتها.
"لله" يقولوا لها "انت تطيب واحنا ناكلوا من تحت يدك و نخدموك.

ومشيوا وخليناهم من هاك النهار ماريناكم.

لولشا (S1)

كان يا ما كان الله في كل مكان
بيتنا حريير وبيتكم كتان وببيت الاعداء بالجرايع والفئران
حديثنا عجيب صلاتنا وصلاتكم على النبي الحبيب
عزوزة الستوت لا يرحمها نهار اللي تموت
تخرج من عين الابرة المسقية تقول موسعك يا ملك ربي علي
تدخله من زنونة الابريق تقول الضيق لا يحملني شيء لانطيق
مشات تجيب في السمن جابت مخ السوق في الصحن
مشات تجيب في العجار مطوي جابته يمشي.
يا سادة ويا مادة يدلنا ويدلكم على الخير والشهادة

كانكم ما كان

على تاجر. هاك التاجر عندها بنيت عمه. هو يحلف برأسها وهي تحلف برأسه. يوم من الايام قال لها "نحب نمشي لسيدي بلحسن" قالت له "برا"

هو مشي لسيدي بلحسن وعرضه صاحبه. قال ل "عندي بتاتي زيت باش نجيبهم لك الوقت ضيق بوة تجي الكميونة تهزهم" قال له "ميسالش"

(في بيوت بكري كانت الدريبة كبيرة). جاب هاك البتاتي متع الزيت 40 بتية ... حطهم. قعدوا. عندهم خادم. قالت لازم ثمة سبة في ها البتاتي. سككت ليلتها ساهرين الضوء تقص. قالت سيدي جاب بتاتي متع زيت توة ناخذ شوية ونعمل فتيلة ... فيهم الاغطية. هي هزت الغطاء وهي تلقى شاشية حمراء. قالت آه عندي ما عند حد تمشي تاخذ الزيت من البيدون متاعهم تسخنه في الطنجرة .. تحميه ... وكل بتية تعريها وتصب فيها. ما توا هاك الاربعين وهو قال لهم نرمي الحجرة الاولى والحجرة الثانية وانتما عريوا البتاتي باش نسرقوا قالوا له باهي. ثمة حتى شبيء ... هاك الوصيفة مشات للاتها قالت لها رام هاذمكا ما همش زيت راهم عباد. سككت على روحها. من غدوة جاء هاك الراجل عمل روحه ما في بالوش. قال له اعطيني هاك البتاتي. هز هاك البتاتي. لشوا على هاك 40 سارق بالزميم متاعهم. وقال باش تمنع مني ما تمنعش. غزر مولى الدار

قال "صارت لي ها العملة في ها الدار انا نبيعتها وخرج منها هالبلاد ما عايش فيها امان". الصباح صبح واللي يصلي على النبي يربح . حطّ في الجرائد الدار باش تتباع. سمع هاك الزميم قعد يعس عليه. باع الدار. شرا ناقة لمرته وناقة ليه ومشاوروا . في عوض يحط مرته من قدام ... حط مرته من تالي. شري هو جمل زادة . خلط عليهم د، قعد شادد بعبوص الناقة . الراجل الجمل متاعه يجري والآخر متع مرته شادد له بعبوصه. يتلفت يقول لها هيا ما هوش فاطن اللي شاددها. يخلي بلاد ويعمر بلاد ما يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد بالجمل متاعه طار في الخلاء المخلي .

الزميم خلط عليها قال لها اسمع 40 سارق متاعي اللي قتلتهم لي، انت ماكش مانعة توة .. (لبعد) رأسك نحيه لك ... سككت . أش عندها باش تتكلم جاء في الخلاء، كتفها في شجرة ومشى باش يجيب الحطب يحرقها ... بعد على هاك البقعة ... متعدي ملاح قالت له "يا بي اللي يعمل الخير يعرضه راه غريمي باش يقتلني. اللي تعمل تعمل لربي" عنده زنبيله في البهيم حله .. حطها في الزنبيل غطاها ومشى. رجع الآخر ما لقهاش. مشى شاف الملاح، يا بابا... يا بابا .. ريتش مرا. هو يقول له يا بابا والآخر ماشي. آه أش قلت قال انا باش نضيع وقتي معاه ... فك علي نمشي نفركس مشى...

هاك الملاح وصل لدويرته ... هبطها من الزنبيل قالت له "يا بي راوا هكة وهكة"

قال لها "اقعد على روحك الآمان عليك . نحسبك بنيتي". قعدت معاهم هو مرته عزوزة . تطيب وتقضي. نارهم قريبة لدار السلطان نهار ولد السلطان طار له الحمام متاعه . من السطح الى سطح ... وصل للسطح متاعهم . هي شابة قطعة سبحان الخلاق فيما يخلق . هي تنشر في الصابون وهو قعد كاشخ.

امي الكبيرة منين عندها .. ما عندهاش بنات ، منين جات؟ وهي تمشي لدار السلطان .. هبط من السطح هاذك عيط لامك الكبيرة قال لها "يا امي الكبيرة الطفلة اللي عندك؟"

قالت له "انا طفلة ما عنديش؟" هي وصاتها قالت لها "رد بالك تقول تخرج خبر اللي تخرج خبر اللي انا بحذاكم"

الراجل دار على روجه راجلها مالقهاش .. سلم .. (ماوا الرجال والزمان ما فيهم امان).

قالت له "ما عنديش بنات"

قال لها "اسمع اما تقول لي. الحقيقة والا (لبعد) نقص لك رأسك"

قالت له "راوا هكة.. وهكة.. وهكة.."
قال لها "برا قل لها تاخذنيش؟"
قالت له "توة نقول لها"
رجعت للدار قالت لها. " لا يا ميمتي الحكاية هاذي ما نتسطهاش ما
دام غريمي حي انا ما ناخوش"
قالت لها كيفاه يا بنيتي ولد السلطان؟"
قالت لها "برا قول له ما ناخذكش"
مشات قالت له . قال لها برا قول لها "قالك نعمل لك ثلاثة سيودة
على اليمين وثلاثة على اليسار والعسكر لباب الدار. وما تشرف حتى
خطر."
مشات قالت لها "يا بنيتي ولد السلطان ... يا بنيتي في طولك في
مرضك"
قالت لها "امشي قول له ... نعرس بروبة كحلة والخبر هذا ما
تخرجوش"

سي الغريم متاعها ما لقهاش . قال وين عندها باش تمشي من
ها البلاد. ما تخرجش قاعد يدور في هاك البلاد.
عرست بالروبة الكحلة .. عملها الصيودة على اليمين وصيودة على
اليسار ... العسكر. اكاهو. قعدت هي وولد السلطان.

برا..برا برا..يا زمان وايجيا زمان .غريمها قرب لدار السلطان . سمع
اللي فلانة (ماوا الخبر ما يقعدش) . عرس بيها ولد السلطان. قال ما
عندي عند حد ... توة نمشي لهاك العسكر" .
الحال حال صيف مشي عمل قلة لموناضة .. ردهم صاحبهم مرة يجيب
كعك، مرة لموناضة .. ولى هاك العسكر يموتوا عليه . قال لهم آش
بيكم ها العسة الكل؟"

قالوا له "في البيت هاذيك كما نقولوا، عمل روحه ما علموش. قالوا
"عاملها صيودة شكون يقرب لها"

حضر البرنامج متاعه . جاء نهار من النهارات ، الدنيا صيف. اعمل
كعك ولموناضة حط فيهم البنج ومشى خذا لحم دهنه بالبنج ، في
العشية دار عليهم هما بالكعك ولموناضة الي هذا داخ مات (يتكي ما
عادش يقوم). مشي للصيودة ... رمالهم جكوات لحم طاحوا... طلع
للسطح . عمل ماكينة وبدا ينقب . نقبة جات على فرشها هي قد قد.
هبط لها اعطاها كف على اليمين وكف على اليسار
وقال لها "يا قوم"

قالت له "استنى.. نمشي معاك في سورية نوم؟"
مشات لراجلها تفيق فيه (مبنج) تضرب على وجهها وتدور
يقول لها "ايا فيسع" تقول له "استنى عندي حاجة نفركس فيها."
هي هكاكة تدادي وتضرب على وجهها والراجل لا قال نقوم. هي هكاكة
والحيط يتشقق لها. قالت لها "اشبيك؟"
قالت لها "غريمي جاء"
قالت لها "عاهدني نفيق لك راجلك اما كان تجيب طفلة لي وكان
طفل ليك . عاهدني"
قالت لها "هذا عاهد كان طفلة ليك وكان طفل لي"

مشات عطات كف لراجلها قالت له "قوم مرتك غريمها جاء"
قام قال السيف والتدنداف ونحي اللحمه بين الاكتاف" فاقوا هاك
العسكر، فاقوا هاك الصيودة. خطفوه كلاووه طرف طرف هاك الغريم
متاعها . زينت البلاد ، تعملت الموزيكات .. عرس عليها . سبعة ايام و
سبعة ليل لي لا من ينفخ و لا من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان

ثلاثة وحم وثلاثة شحم وثلاثة ييبسوا جلده على العظم تطلق طلقة
تجيب طفلة قد الفلقة تقول لقمر انزل والا خليني ننزل حبات ، دبات
شدت في العصية ومشات ولد الدنيا يكبر في عام واثنين وولد الخرافة
يكبر في كلمة وكلمتين. كبرت البنية مشات للمكتب ونسات العاهد .
قالت لها ما اتسعوهاش اوك فلانة واكا هو. تجي عربية تشد هاك
البنية تبوسها تضمها وتقول لها "قول لامك هاك القضية"
البنية الصغيرة تنسى كل مرة تشدها تقول لها قول لامك هاك
القضية حتى نهار من النهارات قدمتها. كبرت الطفلة 14 والا 15
سنة . قدمتها. جات نهار امها تبديل لها. قالت لها "اسم الله على
بنيتي .. أش بيها يدك زرقاء؟"
قالت لها "اي يا ماما راوا كل يوم تعرضني مرا تبوسني وتعنقني
وتقول لي قول لامك هاك القضية .

تفكرت حطتها قدامها بكات بكات حتي شبعنت قالت لها كيف تجيك
قول لها "من فم الي فم"
قالت لها "غمض عينيك"
غمصت عينيها تلقي روحها في بقعة اخرى.. نحب امي نحب امي
سكتتها. بكات وسكتت .. عطاتها الذهب .. الديامنت ... الطفلة تفهم.
سماتها لوشا امشي يا لوشا، ايجا يا لوشا. قالت لها اسمع حلت لها

بيوت. بيت بالذهب بيت بالديامنت، بيت باللوز .. كل بيت نوع .
(يا لله) 6 بيوت ... والسابع بيت قالت لها "رد بالك تحلها هاك
العربية فرحانة بيها باش تموت بالفرحة تفلي لها في راسها . قالت
له "خبي ثم" . قالت لها "يعيشك قول لي"
قالت لها "هذاك قرطاس حرقني بالنار"

حطته في شونها.

قالت لها "رجعته؟"

قالت لها "مليح"

لقات قرطاس آخر. قالت لها "اشنوة هذا؟".... الاول مرة قالت لها
"تردني شوك وقندول والثاني تحرقني بالنار قالت لها وهاذاي؟"
قالت لها "ترميني وراء السبعة بحور."
حطتهم في شونها. قالت لها. "رجعتهم لي يا لوشا؟" قالت لها "
رجعتهم لك"

جات العربية نهار وقالت لها "انا باش نسفر (باش تعمل غلبة اخر)
ورد بالك تحل هاك البيت السابعة" قالت لها ل"ا ما نحلهاش"
هي مشات وهي خرجت هاك القرطاس وقالت هي شنوة الشبيء
البيوت الذهب والديامنت عطاتهم لي ... السابعة مانحلهاش علاش؟
حلت البيت السابعة تلقي بيت طويلة. دخلت تلقي بهرة متع ضو ...
زادت القدام ... تلقى واحد شباب عزيز غالي وعلى قلبه حجرة جاءته
وقالت له "يا نائم يا نائم" هي قالت يا نائم وهو شفق طلعت روحه .
هي طلعت روحه وهي خرجت تجري تجري سكرت هاك الباب هي
تسكر في الباب والعجاج عجاج والسحاب سحب (اسم الله) والريح
..ريح .. قالت جات باش تقتلني ترمي هاك القرطاس اللي ترجعها
شوك وقندول قالت لها آآه عملتها في يا لوشا هي جات ترمي في
القرطاس ارميني ورا السبعة بحور والعربية قالت لها "خوذ يا
لوشا. كيف يضيق بيك الحال شعل سيقارو افتلني وشعل سيقارو".
مدت لها خصلة من شعرها ... هزت هاك الخصلة حطتها في شونها
ورماتها ورا السبعة بحور تهنات قالت توة رتحت. دخلت للدار لبست
حوائجها ذهبها وصياغتها وخرجت.

ماشية ماشية.... ماشية...تخلي بلا وتعمر بلا، ما يعمرها كان العزيز
الجواد. عيات. جاب على حجرة وقعدت. هي قاعدة والسارح اللي
متعدي

قالت له "تحبش تعطيني حوائجك وتوخذ حوائجي؟

قال لها "يزي بلاتمنييك"

قالت له " نكلم فيك بالمنجد .. اعطيني حوائجكموخذ حوائجي"
فرح هاك السارح . نحا هاك الحوائج متاعه وعطاهم لها . لبستها.
النقاب اللي نعملوه . لمت شعرها . وقعدت على هاك الحجرة هي قاعدة
 . وهالبسطاجي اللي متعدي قريب لدار السلطان يطيح له جواب .. آه
يبكي هاك البسطاجي . يا ناري سيدي باش ينحي لي راسي". قالت
له "علاش تبكي، برا جيب ما سوا وجواب . وتوا نكتب لك جواب خير
منه"

قال لها "بالمنجد؟"

قالت له "بالمنجد" (توا الى يكلم فيه سارح موش مرا). مشى يجري
جاب لها ماسو وورقة . كتبت له جواب بالخط متاعها .. فرح . هز
الجواب . حل السلطان الجوابات . آه الحواب موش كيف الاخرين . قال
له نعم قال له الجواب هذا موش كيف الاخرين"
قال له "هذاك هو بيده"

قال له "جيبولي البسطاجي"

مشاوا جابوا له البسطاجي . قال له " قول لنا شني قصة ها الجواب
قال له " يا سيدي الكذب ينجي الصدق انجا وانجا . راه الجواب طاح لي
في الماء ولقيت سارح قاعد على حجرة .. راه هو اللي كتب لي الجواب"
قال لهم " في الوقت براوا جيبوه"
مشاوا يجريوا جابوه يلقاووه قاعد . ما هي عيات عاد . جابوه هزوه
للحمام .

قالت " ما نمشي للحمام كان الحمام يكون فارغ"

قال له "عاد اشبيه"

فرغوا الحمام، خلعوا له الحمام .. عطاه كسوة عزيزة غالية . لبستها
غطات بزاز لها باش ما يظهرش .
قال نحطه كاتب متاعي . ايا سيدي من جنب السلطان ما يتحركش .
يكتب له الجوابات . مرت السلطان راته .. عجبها . بعثت له وقالت له
" تهواش من يهواك؟"

قال لها " لا نهوى من يهواك ولا نموت على داك الله يحييني كان نكسر
حرام سيدي"

قالت له "عجب انا بطولي بطولي يقول له هكة انا نعرف آش نعمل
له"

شدت الوزير . تمهر في الوزير . جاء السلطان وقال له يا سيدي انا
ها الكاتب ظهر لي عينيه خائنة . يظهر لي مرا قال له "عجب؟"
قال له "هكة ظهر لي ولا الاله الاالله"
قال له "عافلوه"

غافلوا وافرش الفرش بالياسين. (المرا الياسين يذبال والراجل ما يذبالش).

مشي الوزير جاب طبق باليا سمين رماه على الفرش. وشكر الباب وخرج. هي جات ترقد لقات الياسين .. فهمت فمة قصة نحات الياسين لمته وطلعت رقدت. الصباح رجعت رماته على الفرش الياسين ما يذبالش، كما حطوه كما لقاووه .

قال له "أش لقيت؟"

قال له ك"ما حطيت كما لقيت"

قال له "ما ني قلت لك يا وزير راجل."

دهر له مديدة عاودت مرت السلطان بعثت له "تهواش من يهواك" قال لها "لا نهوى من هواك (لبعد) لا نموت على داك. لا يحييني كان نكسر حرام سيدي"

قالت "اوه" وزادت اوه تشوات . "انا نبعث له وهو يعصيني؟"

جاء الوزير. قال له ي"ا سيدي انا يظهر لي نفرش له شوك وقنديل. الراجل نحمل والمرا ما تحملش تصبح تابعة وتشكي باجابها (المرا ديما رقية على الراجل) .

قال له "آيه بالمنجد"

مشي فرش له فرشه بالشوك والقنديل. هي جات ترقد وهي حت الشوك. ايا قالت. موش لازم نرقد في الفرش خلّي كما حطوهو، جات على فوتاي ورقدت الصباح صبح و اللي صلى على النبي يربح . قامت تخدم. لا جبدت الحكاية لا حتى شيء. قال السلطان "قلت لك راجل، لو كان مرا راهي صبحت مريضة" . السلطان سلّم. مرت السلطان قالت لهم "الليلة؟"

توة ، كمالة العامين. عامين قد قد . لا ماجتوش معاي . انا نصيح وانتما كسروا البلار. قالوا لها "مليح"

مشات هبطت له . قالت ل "شوف هاني جيتك."

قال لها "روح على روحك لا يحييني كان نخون سيدي. انت ما ييلك كان للاتي"

بالفحول ، صاحت والخدام البلار كسروه، سمع الملك قام يجري ساق بالشلاكة وساق بلاش . قال "شنوة؟"

قالت "الكاتب متاعك زادم علي ، بدا علي بالعيب"

قال له "الكاتب متاعك (لبعد) تنحي رأسه"

الصباح صبح والي يصلي على النبي يربح . عيط للوزير قال له "دور الكاتب للمشنقة"

قال له "علاش؟"

"آش عمل لك"

قال له "قلت لك دوره للمشنقة بعدما وصل بدا لي على الحرمة متاعي"

"يا سيدي العن الشيطان"

قال له "شيء، هزوه للمشنقة وباش نحضر عليه"

مشا هاك الوزير للكاتب علمه خرجوه من الصرايا قال لهم "خليني نشعل سيقارو" قال له "باهي"

شعلت السيقارو من هاك الشعر الي عندها. جبدت النفيس الاول والنفيس الثاني ... السحاب سحب والريح ريح .. وجاتها كيف الغولة. جات. هي جات وهما قاعدين باهتين في هاك السحاب هذاك. وهي نحات لها الكشطة ... خطفتها وقالت له "بغل بابن بغل ، بنتي عندك عام واثناس شهر ولاعرفتها لا انثة ولا ذكر؟"

هي نحات لها الكشطة وسيبت الشعر وخرج الزين على حاله ... طارت بيها .. وهو يقول "جيبوها لي. جيبوها لي". وهي ويني هزتها الاخرى وطارت بيها. هي هاك الغيبة هاذيك عامين مشات تحوم جابت راجل. جابتها وعرست لها عليه وعملت لها عرس عريز غالي سبعة ايام و سبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ و لا من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان وعملت ممشي بين امها الاصلانية وامها هاذيكة. الطفلة تعدت ما بين امها هاذي وامها هاذي .

و عاشوا في الثبات و النبات حتى ماتت و مات.

كانك ما كان كان الله في كل مكان
بيتنا حرير وبيتكم كتان بيت الاعداء الجرايم والفيران
حديثنا عجيب بالترتيب وصلاتنا وصلاتهم على النبي الحبيب.
عزوزه الستوت لا يرحمها نهر اللي تموت
تدخل من عين الابرا المسقية تقول موسعك يا ملك ربي عليا
تدخل من زنونة البريق تقول الضيق لا يحملني شيء لا يطيق.
مشات تجيب في السمن جابت مخ السوق في الصحن
مشات تجيب في العجار مطوي جابته يمشي
يا ساده ويا ماده يد لنا ويد لكم على الخير والشهادة

كانكم ما كان
ثمة سلطان عمره ماشقه الضنا ... ليل مع نهار وهو يطلب في ربي ،
اعطيني صغير، يا ربي اعطي صغير - ديما يطلب في ربي، ربي حب
يجازيه نهار هو راقد وهو جاه ها الملك ، قال له " تحب طفل بالحنة و
عيش و لا طفلة بالحنة و تموت. وقال اعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم
الشيطان يلعنه. عاود وقف عليه الملك. استغفر الثالث مرة قال له
"انا راني مانيش شيطان انا ملك ربي ارسلني ليك على خاطر انت
تطلب في ربي ربي يجازيك . يشاورك"
الثاني مرة هو استعوذ ومرته قالت له "شبيك يا سيدي نومك مفزوز
وسريرك مهزوز؟". قال لها.

قالت له "قل له بنية، احنا سلاطين بالمال نغلبوا بالرجال نغلبوا".
كيف وقف عليه الملك وقال له "انا راني مانيش شيطان انا ملك قال
له بنية قال له "كيف تقوم تلقي بحنا الميزان القبلي تمرة تاكل انت
شطرها ومرتك شطرها وتبخر بالنواء متاعهم وتكفي السر". قال
"مليح". قام توضى صلي. لقاهاك التمرة. كلا هو شطر ومرته شطر
.. بخر بالنوا وكما السر.

طلع الشهر صحيح. شهير شهير ثلاثة وحم وثلاثة شحم وثلاثة ييبسوا
الجلد على عظم . وقت اللي دخل شهرها جات الطرازة وهو بني لها
قصر مرمز في التراب معلق في السحاب. باش يبعد عليها المخات
الكل . (اما الكاتب كاتب). ولدت المرا عطاهم ربي طفلة طلقت طلقة
جابت طفلة قد الفلقة تقول للقمر انزل ولا خننزل . نفست بيها

اربعين يوم قامت هي قعد هو وين نافسة بيها. في دارها وبعد هزها للقصر هي والخادم متاعها هاك الطفلة ما تعرف حد ولا ترا حد .. ما تعرف كان بوها وامها. والخادم نهار من النهارات. كبرت البنية صبية ولات. عامل لها سباله قدام القصر.

نهار من النهارات. الخادم مرضت. مستانسة اللحم تجيب لها بلاش عظم. القصر بلار الكله. مرضت الخادم ما نحتش العظم. قالت لها يا للة اليوم العظم نحيه وحدك. قالت لها "ميسالش". حطت لها الفطور. والعظم ها الي فيه المخ جات هي على القاعة وضربت. هي ضربته البلاز تكسر وهي قعدت تظل ... عمرها ما شافت. تحت منها ناس ماشية جاية تطل ... بهتت "قمة ناس وعباد بخلاف امي وبابا؟" هي قاعده تطل وباهة ... وهالعربية عزوزة الستوت اللي متعدية تبكي وتصيح علي ولدها. قالت لها "يا امي اش بيك"

قالت لها "اسم الله الرحمان الرحيم انت انس والا جان"

قالت لها "انس من خيار الجنس"

قالت "اللهم صلي على النبي علي هذا الجمال. حل خليني نشوفك" حلت لها الباب. قالت "يخلق ربي .. ملا شعر وملا شعر ناقص السيسبان وزيت اللبان"

قالت لها "منين؟"

قالت لها "بوك ملك .. يجيبه لك".

خرجت هاك العربية. قامت الخادم قالت لها "للة آش عملت لي لو كان يجي سيدي كان يجي سيدي يقلتني". شدت هاك البقعة شدتها اوك مرة بجي امها ومرة يجي بوها يطل عليها. طلعت في فرش الغبن ودهنت روحها بالتبن. جاء بوها. "اسم الله على بنتي آش بيك؟"

قالت له "يا بابا نحب السيسبان وزرت البان"

هي قالت له ها الكلمة هاذي وهو يهز يدها ويعطيها كف. قال لها "اشكون قال لك عليه؟" سكتت ما وخافت يقول لا على البلا (امالا) سكتت. روح للدار وعرق الغضبين عينيه. "الطفلة كبرت". قالت له "آش بيك اسم الله عليك بنتي مريضة"

قال لها "بدات محنة بنتك تتحل"

قالت له "آش نوة آش ثمة؟"

قال لها "بنتك تحب السيسبان وزيت البان".

قالت له "عاداشبيه السيسبان وزيت البان؟"

قال لها "هذا تتشم رائحته في البلاد كما نقول من مصر الى اسكندرية. تتشم الريحه متاعه"

قالت له "قرات في الكتب . بنتنا قارية (ما والنساء ديما تغلب)
تضرب بنتي على هذا امشي وصيها وجيبه لها".
بعث للوزير متاعه جابوا لها ومشي رضاها.
قال لها "ادهن بالشوية" (راهي رائحته تفوح)

خليناها غادي . سي حمد الهلالي عنده بنت عمه . شابة قطعة راضع
هو وياها الحليب. يقول لها "يا لندرايا يا بنت عمي ناخوش وحدة
كيفك ؟"

تقول له "ربي يعطيك"
ماخذ مرا موش كما بنت عمه
قالت له "ثمة وحدة يقول اسمها رداح ام الزين وشابة يحكيوا عليها"
قال لها "وين هاذي"
قالت له "كما نقولوا في تونس"
قال لها "توا نسفر"

هو شباب قطعة عربي لبس زوز برانس ... عمل النقاب والمكحلة وقال
ياللي ما تخيب حد . يخلي بلاد ويعمر بلاد ما يعمرها كان العزيز
الجواد . جاء في بقعة فمة موقف متع عرب غناية يتفرج .
قالت له "يا شباب يا ختوش، انت قاصدنا والا جاي تزور"
قال لها "لا قاصدكم ولا جاي نزور تخبرني على رداح اللي ذهبت
العقول"

قالت له "كان عينك في الجنة قريبة اما جهنم عتيبة"
قال لها "كان عيني في هالقمح راني كليت من بلادي"
قالت له "كتبة مشومة دازتك"
دور حصانه ومشي . زاد القدام . يلقي موقف آخر وهو شباب اللي
كانت تشطح جاءته.

قالت له "يا راكب الهاشمية قاصدنا والا ماشي ثنية ؟"
"لاني قاصدكم . انا ماشي ثنية تخبرني على رداح اللي ذهبتلي
العقلية"

قالت له "كان عينك في الجنة قريبة اما جهنم عتيبة"
قال لها "كان عيني فيها القمح راني كليته من بلادي"
مشى على روجه بدا يقرب هو بدا يقرب والريحة بدات تقرر
قالها ادهن بالشوية، الطفلة طاحت تصب وبدهن.
ماشى.. ماشى.. ماشى.. وصل لباب بحر. يلقا يهودي صبابطي. قال
له "يا وليدي اشنية هالريحة ؟"

قال له "ريحة السيسبان وزيت البان ريحة رداح ام الزين.
صدرها تفاح في الهوى يرتاح
شعرها بالسيسبان وزيت البان
سنة وستين ظفيرة في كل شيرة
خدودها رمان وشفائفها مرجان
لاهي طويلة من نخل ولا هي قصيرة من التالفات
لاهي بيضة طبق حليب لا هي سمراء من الغامقات
عليها زنود وعليها نهود وعليها سنون جوهر منظوم
صدرها تفاح في الهوى يرتاح
ها ها (شيخه من غير ما راها)....
نهارتها هي قالت لاداد "حط لي الماء باش يسخن باش نغسل لحمي"
ملني قلت لك عامل لها لوها سباله اللوطة.
قال له "ويني هي؟"
قال له "اوك القصر قدامك"
حطت باش تغسل. بعثت دانا باش تجيب لها الماء. توة تجي دادا توة
تجي دادا لا دادا لا حتي شيء. واقفة تغزر واقفة تغزر له (عجبها) ايا
فاقت. دادا طلعت الماء.
قالت لها "أش بطاك يا دادا؟"
قالت "بطاني شباب مختر حصانه معنكر
تحت عودة تبيري غنجة
غزر لي غزرة ما طاقني صبرة"
قالت لها "برا قول له مانا بلاد تكون؟"
جاءه قالت له "يا سيدي بن سيد، بالكتب اللي تعد فيهم مانا بلاد
تكون؟"
قال لها "سلم على للاك وقل لها انا حمد الهلالي اللي متسمي في نهج
هلال. واما المعارك والمشالي نخرج بسيف العجب قتال"
قالت لها قال لك "انا حمد الهلالي، اللي متسمي في هلال وقت العرك
والمشالي، نخرج بسيف العجب قتال"
جبدت القشابية متاعها وطلت من الباب جات العين في العين هي
وياه...

قال لها
انا جيتك يا رداح من الكاتبات
شفت ارايا من الشماتات

مكوي كي الذباح
عل العروق متنافذات
ما ننسأكش يا رداح
نرجع من التأثبات

قالت له
ما اكبر هبالك يا حمد الهلالي طامع في شجرة من غير اثمار
ما اكبر هبالك يا حمد الهلالي طامع في معلم وكدس حجار

قال لها
ليك حب مال الزمان
لا يلي لا بدنيا ولا بهتوتها
خوذني حتي على شبوبها

قالت له
طير البر ما يوالم البحر
وطير البرانيس في كل وكار
والحرير والكتان ما يخرج
كان على الاكابر والتجار

خلاها . دور حصانه ومشى . حلت هي الباب . تلقاه تضوي منه
الدمساء (الله الله).

قالت له
غضبيه ولا هربية ؟
الغضبية عند الاجواد تعور .

قال لها
لاني غضبية ولاني غربية
وكذلك الغضبية عند الاجواد تعور
والي عزبيك هان بي
وهذا شيء بالمكتوب
واذا يجيبك المكتوب لدا .
حتي تكون شادات تروم

قالت له "اطلع"
طلعته . ما وا السلاطين ثلاثة الايام وثلاثة ليالي عروسة وعروس ...
(من البانو صحة صحة!!) ... بعد ثلاثة ايام عطاته الشركة متاعها
قالت له "هز هاك الشركة لبابا"
قال لها "مليح"
هز هاك الشركة هاذيكة روح يجري لبنت عمه
قال لها "لقيتها يا بنت عمي"
قالت له "اوصفها لي يا ولد عمي"

قال لها
لاهي طويلة من نخل
لا قصيرة من التالفات
لا هي بيضاء من طبق الحليب
لا هي سمرة من الغامقات
عليها زنود وعليها نهود
وعليها سنون جوهر منظوم
صدرها تفاح في الهوى يرتاح
شعرها بالسيستان وزيت البان
سته وستين ظفيرة في كل شيرة

(الله الله!!)
قالت له "جيبها لي ولد عمي ندقك عليها السبعة حجات"
قال لها "خوذ هالي يا بنت عمي انا توباش نسا فر كما تقولوا باش
نمشي لفرنسا والا امريكا باش نجيب الموبليا ونجيبك الواحد الكل.
اما الشركة هاذي اعطيها لعمار وخليفة يجيبوها.
قالت له "مليح"
خذات هاك الشركة هاذيكة خلاتها عندها.

مشى هو يرجع لمرته . سمعت بيه مرته وين مشي ووين جاء . جاها
قال لها "فيسع فيسع فور لي طرف مسفوف"
فورت طرف مسفوف وحطته له مستانسة تحطه له بالزبدة واللوز
والسكر والخليف . هز الفم الاول ولثاني

قال لها

مسوس يقبل الملح وهو خيار الشهاوي
واللي يفطر عليه الصبح يفك من كل الهاوي

قالت له

كأس المر لا من يحمله لا من يريده
انت بدلتني بغيري كل حد يلقي مناه

هز روحه ومشى . سفر على روحه . الاخرى بنت عمه وقفت تبيض
وتدهن في الدار. قال لها نبعثك وقتاش ما نجي كان عروس
جاء الميجال باش يجيبوها، عيطت لعمار وخليفة
قالت لهم "باش تجيبوا مرت سيدكم . خوزوا الشركة وادووها وما
تقابلوا كان الملك"

بدلوا بلايزهم ومشاوا. وصلوا الملك يحكم والناس داخلة خارجة.
قالوا لهم "شاكيين؟"

قالوا لهم ل"ا جينا باش نقابلوا سيدنا"
مشى للملك قال له "يا سيدي راوا زوز عرب يحبوا يقابلوك"
قال له "بعدهما نوفى الحكم زوزهم"
ايا وفى الحكم زوزهم . واحد منهم رمى له السبحة هو رمى له هاك
الشركة والمملك طلع ما هبط.
(عندهم كيف يعطيو الشركة هاذيك. وفي الطفلة حبت).
بعث الوزير متاعه قال له "خرجوا الكلبة بنت الكلب بفراشية الخبز"
جاتها الخادم.

قالت لها

قد سيدي ما دلك وخلاك
وحطك في قصر بلاد لا حد نهم يراك
جاء واحد عربي قعر و خذاك

غزرت للخدمة وقالت "موش هاذم اللي جاوني"
سكتت. هي ماي بنت ملك موش مستانسة بالشمس. هزوها يتعداوا
عليها ما خلاتهمش.
يقول لها "يا رداح ما تقولش الدوني
خلي عمارة يدخل بين الصدر والحوالي"

سكتت على روحها. بدا واحد يدز في واحد. في الشمس حضرية
مسيكنة خلاها حتي ضربتها الشمس ... وصلت في حالة باش تموت
... (منين تهرب من غضب بوها) وصلت لبنت عمه.
حطتها في السبعة حجابات. عطاتها الدوء.
السخانة تاكل فيها وهي باش تموت. تقول "يا ناري"
الاخر بعث الموبليات والريدوات. كلمها في التليفون
قال لها "جات؟"
قالت له "جات وحطتيها لك في سبعة حجابات"

المرا في اللجائج قالت لها "آ أه لو تكمي السرمانا نقلك"
... لا قبل الخماسة.
قالوا له "ياللة نجوا تطلوا على مرت سيدي"
قالت لهم "زوزوا دخلوا لها"
"شنوة حوالك؟"
قالت لهم ل"و كان جاء بوزيد يقدم تقديم وينحي على القلب صديم"
قال له "اغزر اغزر أش قالت الله لا يقيمها"
خرجوا على نفسهم ... وقعدت هي بالفصرات.
قالت لبنت عمه "آ أه لو كان تكمي السرمانا نقلك"

قالت لها
سرك نكميه ونحطه في جواجي
وامي اللي توجعت بي ما نعيدلهاش بيه
اصبر حتى يجي مخلوف من وسط النخلية

قالت لها
اناموضة وهو كيف ما ابعد لطيف
انا مريضة من غير اذا
وهو مقتول من غير سيف

وشهقت طلعت روحها . ماتت . هي ماتت والاخرى "اوه علي ولد عمي
باش يتحمص. أش تعمل أش نقول؟"
عندها جارية شابة اسمها نور الصباح ... هيا قالت ما نحملش ولد
عمي نقتله.
او ك عاد دفنت رداح في البيت وعملت لها قبر ... شدوا نور الصباح ..

هزوها للحمام .. يد يد، ساق ساق. حناوا لها... سنجروا لها...نقاوا لها.. لبسوها.

نرجعوا لحمد الهلالي ... ثمة اشكون رجع عليه الخبر، قالوا الي جبتها راهي ماتت.

قال كان ماتت توا نلقي القصر ظلام. حط مرايات الهند. وكان ماتت توا نلقي القصر يشعل بنت عمه قالت "خلوا له القصر يشعل باش ولد عمي ما يتحمصش يموت. شاف قال يكذبوا عليّ باش يحمصوني .. عملها تليفون

قال لها "راني جاي عروس"
قالت له "اش بيه"

ايا اوصل

قال لها "يا بنت عمي جات؟"

قالت له "رهاي جات وراني دقيت عليها السبعة حجات استنى .. ريش روحك."

قال لها " لا هي هكة ونور الصباح جا يبينها .. هو غزر اليها وقال لها "بنت عمي، هاذي نور الصباح ايا قل لي وين رداح؟"

قالت له "ولد عمي كان الكذب ينجي الصدق انجا وانجا راهي ماتت."
قال لها "ماتت"

قالت له "ماتت وهاو القبر متاعها دفنتها هوني"

قال لها

يا بنت عمي قتيل الشمس تحييه المطار

واستحمدت بعدما ماها

بعد رداح وجه القمار ن

نموت ولا نجيب نباها.

وطاح مات . (اكا هوا المكتوب جمعهم والمكتوب فرقههم)..حلت هي القبر هاذاك ودفنتهم مع بعضهم .

ومشيئا وخليئناهم من هاك النهار ما ريناهم..

كان يا مكان كان الله في كل مكان.

بيتنا حريير وبيتكم كتان بيت الاعداء بالجرايع والفيران
حديثا عجيب صلاتنا و صلاتكم على النبي الجيب
عزوزة ستوت لا يرحمها نها اللي تموت
تدخل من عين الابرة المسقية تقول يا موسعك يا ملك ربي علي
تخرج من زنونة الابريق تقول الضيق لا يحملني شييء لا نطيق
مشات تجيب في السمن جابت مخ السوق في صحن
مشات تجيب في العجار مطوي جابته يمشي.
يا سادة ويا مادة يدلنا ويدلكم للخير والشهادة

كانك ما كان

على هاك السلطان عايش لابس عليه. عمره ماشقه ضنا يطلب في ربي وقف عليه ملك. قال له "طفلة بالحنة وتموت والاطفل بالحنة ويعيش". استعوز من الشيطان". قالت مرته "أش بيك سيدنا سريره مهزوز ونومه مفزوز". قال لها . قالت له "احنا سلاطين قل له طفل بالحنة ويعيش". ايا كيف وقف المرة الثانية قال له "طفل بالحنة ويعيش" قل له "او ك ثمة تمرة في الميزان القبلي كول انت شطرها ومرتك شطر" عمل هكة. طلع عليها الشهر صحيح. عطاهم ربي طفل. ثلاثة شحم وثلاثة عظم وثلاثة بيبسوا الجلد علي العضم. يبووق البوا
قين صغير في دار المشتاقين تطلق طلقة تجيب وليد قد الفلقة يقول
للقمر انزل ولا خنزل ... فرح السلطان، الوزراء. عمل اللي باش
يعرس يعرسل له واللي باش يطهر طهر له.
ولد السلطان حبي دبي شد في الحيط و مشى . ولد لدنيا يكبر في عام
و عامين و ولد الخرافة يكبر في كلمة و كلمتين . جاء مدلل جاب له
المعلمين والمدبين واللي يركبوا على الفرسان .. الطفل طلع زاني مفلق
يسقط من السطوح .. كان مرا يتعدى عليها، كان طفلة يتعدى عليها ..
كان راجل كبير يدزه كان صغير يضربه اشكون يكلمه ولد السلطان!
شكات الناس للسلطان. قال لهم "انا فرد طفل كان عجبكم" العباد
تضجرت ياسر تعدى عليهم .

نهار هما قاعدين في قهوة يخمّموا وعزوزة ستوت متعديّة. الله لا يرحمها نها اللي تموت . قالت لهم "شبيكم وليداتي؟"
قالوا لها "راوا ولد السلطان متعدي على نسانا على بناتنا على ولادنا حتي حد ما يسلم منه لا كبير ولا صغير"
قالت "هذا اللي بيكم توة نوريكم فيه آش تحبوا نعمل له. نقطع له خياله من البلاد".

قالوا لها "هذاك آش نحبوا هاذي لنويته"
مشات العزوزة لدارها في الملاسین لبست جبببة خضراء وهزت عكيكز اخضر. مشات للثنية متاعه ومدت ساقها . هي مادة ساقياها وهو تعدى بحصانه عفسها والوزير وراه شدت هاك العزوزة "اي ساقيا! اي ساقيا".

قال لها الوزير "آش بكيك يا عزوزة يا بدعية"
قالت له "بكاني حصان سيدك ضربني ونطر الشاشية وخلالي صبيعي سائلات الدماء ما ننساش حصان سيدك كيف يبدا علي الحاجة مكادة"

مشي قال له "آش بطاك يا وزير بابا" قال له "بطاتني عزوزة بدعية، قالت لي ضربني حصان سيدك ونطر الشاشية وخلالي صبيعي سائلة الدماء ما ننساش حصان سيدك علي الحاجة مكادة. قال له "آش قلت لها، يا وزير؟"

قال له "قلت لها ادركني وقت التنهيدة واستناني توا نجيك."
قال له "صحيت يا وزير كيف عملت لي تاويل"
رجعوا. هما رجعوا وهما لا لقاوا لاعزوزة ولا سيد الدار .. هوني هوني ... شيء.

روح الطفل للقصر ودهن وجهه بالتبن ورقد في فرش الغبن. طبيب داخل طبيب خارج جابوا الطبّة والمنجمين متع القصراللي هذا يقول مرضه قلق لاحمة لاعرق. السلطان بالغلبة يقول ولدي باش يموت .. الطبّة شيء. جابوا له الخرافات. العزائز اللي تقول له كانك يا ما كان يقول لها "البعيدة يعطيك داء مكان قوم علي" يقوموا هاك العزائز. حتي دار على العزائز الكل فمة عزوزة كما نقولوا تسكن في قاع الملاسین. قال "جيبوها". مشي لها الوزير قالت له هو حاجته بي موش انا حاجتي بيه ... هو يجيني ... اشكون يتعني لصاحبه الكبير والا الصغير. "يا بنتي ولد سيدنا ... كيفاش"
قالت له "شيء مانيش متحركة من هوني. مشي الوزير لولد السلطان". قال له. قال له "اي انا نمشي لها"

قام شرب صحفة برودو ومشى للعويزة .
قالت له "آه جيت اعطيني العاهد اللي تخرج بلاش عوين .. تعطيني
العاهد تخرج بلاش رفيق تعطيني العاهد تخرج بلاش سلاح . على
اشكون ؟ على مولاتالعيون السود تجي لقتها وبهاها محصنة عبود
بعيد بعيد تلقاها الحاجة مكادة! مشى لدارهم اعمل زاده وزواده و ما
يقر على قلبه و افاده . قالت له " تخرج بلاش عويل " .. هز عويل قالت
له " تخرج بلاش سلاح هز شكاريتة " .. امه " يا ولدي بوك " .. كيفاش
قال لها " شيء خارج " .

خرج . يخلي بلاد ويعمر بلاد ما يعمرها كان العزيز الجواد . اللي يقول
له " جيب نباها يقول له " منه ؟ " ويضرب ينحي له راسه . هو خرج من
البلاد وبوه دهن البلاد بالاكل وحكم عليهم واحد لا يعرس ولا يطهر
ولا يفرح ما دامكم قطعوا لي راس ولدي .
خرج هو اللي هذا ينحي له راسه .. ينحي راسه قال " أش آخرتها
وانا نحي في الروس من غير ما جيت بنتيجة ، يزي " .

برا...برابرا... ماشي برا ماشي ثم واحد ملاح صبابطي جاء بحذاه
وقعد . قعد بحذاه شوية وخرج خلى كيس خمسة ميا فرح هاك الملاح .
من غدوة كيف كيف . قال لها " يا مرا ثمة واحد يجيني كل يوم ويخلي
خمسة ميات محبوب محبوب ويمشي . قالت له " لازم ناوي على حاجة
احلف عليه ويجيبوا يتعشى " .

قال لها " مليح " .
" يا فلان ايجي تعشى بحذا يا " .
قال له " لواه ؟ " قال له " والله الاما تتعشي بحذا يا " .
مشى للدار حضر عشاها جاء يتعشى . قالت لراجلها " ظاهر لي نسينا
هاك الحاجة " ، هو مشى وهي قالت له " أش تحب ؟ الحاجة مكادة ؟ " .
قال لها " أي " .

قالت " أش هزك يا محمد يا متجول تموت على جالها ممحون ؟ " .
قال لها " شقيت عمرك قصار انا جيت نشاور فيك رجعت لي دبار " .
قالت له " اما لا . اسكت . كان تنعت بالصبع اليد ، الصبع يتقص ..
باليد ، اليد تتقص . بالفم ، الفم يتقص توة نقلك كيفاش تعمل . توة
يهز بدون زيت معاه .. نمشي هو من قدام وانت من تالي حتى كيف
يطيح ردبا لك هو يطيح وانت امشي ولحيه . هذيك بقعتها " .
قال لها " مليح " .

من غدوة خرج هاك الراجل وهو يتبع . ماشي ماشي زلق الراجل ...
شدوه العسكر لموا له .. هو زاد القدام ومشى يلقي الرواء ويلقى دكاكن
ماوا هو عيان جاء الحصان متاعه ربطه وجاء على هاك الدكانة ورقد ...
للا العين قامت تدور في القصر متاعها (الله الله) قالت لها " يا دادا
حمد المتجول جاء ويكون ناظرة في الاشفار ما يكون جوزي كان هو برا
يا دادا للغرفة اعمل لي قرص بالعسل " ... مشات تجري عملت قرص
بالعسل جابتهم مع قمصان ماء.

قالت لها "امشي قيمه، هاك الراقد وقل له خوذ قرص بالعسل قوم
من ها المضرب ما هوش مضرب زل". (والله) . ايا هو ميت عيان
وموش مستانس جاته وقال له "يا سيدي قالت للة خوذ قرص بالعسل
وقوم من ها المضرب ما هوش مضرب زل"
قال لها "سلم على لللاك وقل لها ما حاجتي بقرص العسل، حاجتي
بالشيخ حمودة طير البلاد لانزل"

طلعت قالت لللاتها. قالت لها برا طلعه . عملت بانو عزيز و غالي و
لبست سوريب النوم و سيببت الشعر يذري .
هو طالع .

قال لها

يا حاجة يا مكادة يا كائدة كل كايد
والعلم جاني عشية وركبت وقعد سائب
امن يرف علي لا من يرد الغرائب
عامين يا حاجة انا في الوطن سائب.

قالت له

انا الحاجة بنت عيسى
في الزين حزت التمايم
نخضار نولي سريسة ونستر على الكل كان تائم
لو كان موش يقولوا الحاجة بنت عيسى
و لا في الحج نعمل نبايل

ايا طلع ... قعدوا ثلاثة ايام وثلاثة ليالي عروسة وعروس.....

بوه حزين يبكي ويفرد .. قعدوا ثلاثة ايام وليالي ... بعد مشى هز
السبحة لبوها .. قالت له "هزها لبابا". الحكم وفي دخل له . رمى له
السبحة في حضنه. دخلوا للمقصورة قال له "نا ولد السلطان
الفلاني. خرج بيه.

يعمل تلقيرام لبوه يقول له ولدك في الحفظ ولامان.
عمل له عرس عزيز غالي سبعة و سبعة ليالي لا من يطبخ و لا من
ينفخ كان في دار السلطان. وبعد قال له "هز مرتك وامشي اعمل
عرس في بلادك".

ركب مرته ومشى . بعث له تلقرام قال له راني جاي . تبيضت
البلاد. وتدهنت وصلت لله. عمل له عرس عزيز غالي سبعة ايام و
سبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ و لا من يطبخ كان في دار السلطان

عاشوا في الثبات ولانبات حتى ماتت ومات

كان يا ما كان الله في كل مكان.

يا سادة ويا مادة يدلنا يدلكم على الخير والشهادة
حديثنا بالترتيب وصلاتنا وصلاتكم على النبي الحبيب
على عزوذة ستوت لا يرحمها نهار الي تموت
تدخل من عين الابرّة المسقية تقول يا موسعك يا ملك ربي على
تدخل من زونة البريق تقول الضيق لا يحملني شيء لانطيق
مشات تجيب في السمن جابت مخ السوق في الصحن
مشات تجيب في العجار مطوي جابته يمشي.

كانكم ما كان كان الله في كل مكان.

على راجل هاك الراجل هاذاك حوات من قليبية . يصطاد . عنده
مرته وعنده بنته عائشة، يخدم على رويحه يجيب ماكتب من الله ..
عائشة عندها المعلمة . نهار من النهارات عطاتها حكة وقالت لها
"صبها في وحدة الكسكسي". عطاتها (حشاك) عقربها راتها بنية .
مشات البنية دخلت صبتها غاديكا في الخابية متع الكسكسي.
من غدوة قالت بها "قل لا مك تعطيني شوية كسكسي".
اوكا مرته داقة مسمار قالت له "نعطيك قلة السماح كان انا نموت
وتاخذ مرا وبنتك ما وصلتش لهاك المسمار"
"يا بنيتي صلي على النبي"
قالت له "انا قلت لك والاعمار بيد الله"
مشات قالت لها "يا امي قالت للة اعطيني شوية كسكسي"
هي مشات تعبي في الكسكسي وهاذيك (العقرب) ضربتها طاحت على
ارضها ماتت. قضاء وقدر بيه ربي .
قعدت الطفلة تبكي على امها. شدتها المعلمة عندها تمشط لها وتبد
لها. هكا هكا بيها. "آش بي بوك ماخداش مرا "
" ما نعرفش عليه"

كل يوم تقول لها . حتى نهار قالت لبوها " اشبيك ماخديتش مرا؟"
قال لها "حتى توصل انت لهاك المسمار"
مشات قالت لها . قالت لها "قل هاو معلمتي باهية"
قالت له . قال لها "حتى توصل لهاك المسمار"
نهار المعلمة جاته . قالت له "الدار ممسخة ننظفها"

قال لها ل" اتوة نجيب مرا"
قالت له "الطف انا معلمة بنتك وانت تجيب مرا"
ايا جات لهاك الدار نظفتها، سيققتها، المسمار وطات فيه ... قاستها
..ما زالت ... زادت وطات فيه مرة اخرى ...
المعلمة تجري بهاك الطفلة . كل مرة تجي توطي في المسمار . (ناس
قبل ماوا بهايما يفهموش). حتى نهار من النهارات قالت له "قيسها"
قاسها . يلقاها ولات في طول المسمار .
قال "توا ناخذ مرا"
قالت له "خوذ معلمتي باهية وتحبني"

مشي خطبها خذاها عرّس عليها . عندها طفلة المعلمة اسها حفصة.
ولات المراهك الطفلة عائشة تقطع فيها تقطيع ..من الصباح لليل و
عويشة اقضي.. اغسل ..اعمل .(و لانا محمودين و لانا مشكورين) .
شكون يحن الميمة في الجبانة تبكي وتنوح . مرت بوها تمرمد .. تمرمد
فيها تمرمد كبير . "يا بنيتي ما يجيش طفلة صغيرة" والآخرى تعلم
فيها في الطريزة والشبكة .

نهار جاب الحوت كيف العادة عطاتها تفرقش . جاتها حوتة قالت لها
"سيبني يا عائشة بنت الحوات راك تلقاني قالت لها "مرت بابا
تقتلني تعطيني طريحة. قالت لها "قلت لك سيبني راني نغنيك"
قالت لها "لا نخاف سيبتها"
سرفقت جات في البير . مرت بوها حسبت الحوت .
قالت لها "وين الحوتة الاخرى؟"
قالت لها "طاحت في البير"
قالت لها "اليوم نقتلك . عطاتها مسيكنة طريحة . جات ورمات له
كمشة ملح . قلاته الطفلة . جاء الأب ياكل "شنوة هذا؟"
قالت له "بنتك "
قال لها "صغيرة "

"صغيرة والله ما تاكله كان هي ونطلعها فوق السطح عندي بيت"
حطتها وجابت لها شكاراة قمح ويبة قمح الليلة ترحيه وتاكل هاك
القمح.

عويشة تبكي . تبكي . تبكي .. عطشت ما لقاتش ماء يا ربي عطش
والبيت ظلام . يا ربي عطشت يا ربي عطشت . هي هكة والبيت
ضوات يجيها قدامها بير فضة بالسلسلة ذهب تملى ، تملى .
وجاها الكباش قال لها " يا عائشة يا بنت الحوات اعطيني شريبة"

قالت له " تفضل اشرب " .
قال لها " يعطيك صوفي والحنة متاعه "
هي هكة باش تشرب وجاتها الغزالة .
قالت لها " اعطيني نشرب "
قالت لها " تفضل اشرب "
قالت لها " يعطيك عيني "
هي جات باش تشرب وجاها الحصان . " يا عائشة بنت الحوات اعطيني شريبة "
قالت له " تفضل اشرب "
قللها " يعطيك شعري "
اي الوردة قالت لها " يا عائشة بنت الحوات اعطيني شريبة "
قالت لها " تفضل اشرب "
اي الوردة قالت لها " يجعلك انت تمشي والسبايك الذهب ما بين ساقيك .
جاتها السرولة قالت لها " اعطيني نشرب "
عطاتها . (توة هي الماء في يدها وهي عطشانة)
قالت لها " يعطيك طولي وقدي "
خرجت لها هاك الحوتة . قالت لها " انت اللي ربحت مانى قلت لك سيبنى "
خوذ اشرب . ايا .. ارحاوا هاك القمح .
ترحى هاك القمح وتغربل وقعد في بقعته . قامت الصباح قالت " خليني نحل على المكبوبة نشوفها أش عملت ؟ "
قال لها " بنتي صغيرة "
قالت له " انا نربيها "
هي حلت البيت وهي تلقاها ديامنتا في القطن ..
قالت لها " منين جاك هالخير الكل أش عملت ؟ "
ما قالت شيء .
قالت لها " شيء ما عملت كليت ورحيت اكهو " . قالت لها .
هي بكات والجوهر هبط . هي قامت تمشي والسبابك الذهب هابطين .
لئت وحطتها على قرقاف وجات لبنتها .
قلت لها " قوم "
" ما نقضيش " (هي في دلال لعينيها)
قالت لها " قوم تعلم شوف اختك كيفاش والآت "
برا جيب لها الحوت . مشات جابت الحوت .
هي تنظف فيه وجاتها الحوتة قالت اها " اعطيني نشرب "

قالت لها "نعطيك تشرب وانا عطشانة"
قالت لها "يعطيك شوكي ما بين ساقيك"
جاتها الياسمينه قالت لها "يعطيك خضورتي"
الفلة "يعطيك صفورتي"

السرولة "يعطيك شوكي وقنديلي يجعلك انت تبكي والخناس
والعقارب يهبطوا من بين عنينك وانت تمشي والشوك والقنديل بين
ساقيك"

شربت قالت "شنوة الهم بين عنين يكب سعد امي. هاذيك تدل...
لامانة!! الفئران دايرين بيها . "يكب سعدا امي.. يكب سعدا امي..."

الصباح حلت عليها الباب الاخرى قال لها "حفصة يجعلك كل كلمة
ببصة"

قالت "امي ي امي ي شفت"

قالت "اشنوة هذا اختك خير منك ! اشنية هالفضيحة؟"

هي تتكلم والبص خارج من فمها وحالتها رثة .

"يا ناري ها الغلبة اللي عملتها في بنتي وهي هاك حدّا عليها
والاخرى قعدت جمال وضخامات .

قعدت الاخرى تبكي وتنوح على بنتها حتى ماتت .

وقعدت هي وبوها في الثبات والنبات حتى ماتت ومات.

يا معاندة حكم الله قوم قاسي ما كتبلك من الله (K1)

توحدا الله واللي عليه ذنب يستغفر الله

ثمة تاجر وكل تاجر على ماله فاجر.. هاك التاجر هذاكة معرس مع بنت عمه... ماخذ بنت عمه شابة قطعة .عزيزة عليه .. متعاشر هو وياها متهنى الهناء التام، هو يعيط لله و هي تعيط سيدي .. ما حتى حاجة تحيرهم . في الليل كيف ترقد المرأ، تفرق في النوم تهز تنهيدة من جوارح قلبها. الراجل كادته يقول لابسة. مأكلة. صياغة ... شنوة هذي هالتنهيدة .. ولى الراجل يمشي ويجي جهامة على الارض. ما يقول لهاش وهي ما تفتننش حاجة في قلبه. اشنية التنهيدة الي تتنهدها. حتي نهار قاعد في قهوة ... راجل كبير حاج كما عم عمر قال له "بالله يا فلان اش بيك ؟"

قال له "والله يا عم فلان . عندي قصة راهي مرتي بنت عمي" قال له "نعرف"

قال له "في الليل تبدا راقدة في غطاية نومها تهز تنهيدة ... يا لطيف ماعرفتشن اشنوة .. لا نا قصة صياغة .. لا نا قصة لباس ... لا نا قصة فلوس ... لا نا قصة مأكلة ... مزينها من كل شيء .." قال له "تحب تعرف اشنوة؟"

قال له "على يدك نحجوا"

قال له "شري خوذ عطروس اكحل ما فيه امارة (شنوة عطروس؟)" (عطروس ماعز) ما تقول لهاش وخبيه وخليها ترقد . نصف الليل شق شعرة اهبط واذبحه وشقه بالوقت وخوذ القلب ..خوذ القلب متاعه... حل صدرها وحله على صدرها. توا تسمع القلب آش يقول علاش تتنهذ" قال له " الله يبارك"

مشى شري عطروس . دخله (ما كانتش العيشة كيف توة .. منين يراوا ما ثماش يبدوا الراجل هاو دخل. آش جاب ... ما ثماش بكري كانت بنية ربي) ..شري عطروس عندهم (الديار كانوا فيهم دوامس) حطه في الداموس . ليلة من الليالي عرفها باش ترقد بكري ... بدا متقلق عمل روحه تاغب حصلت فريشها . رقدت رقد هو، حتي غمقت في النوم بدا بعد في الوقت حتي قبل نصف الليل بدقيقة هبط شعل

الضوء. تكى على هاك العتروس. ذبحه بزرربة خطف القلب متاعه سخون وجاها يجري شمعة في يده. وصل لصدرها وحطه القلب هاكية. هو حط القلب وهو تنهد قال القلب متع العتروس "علاش نتنهد؟"

قال له "على المشقة اللي باش نعديها ... عندي عام طالبة وعام سارقة وعام فاجرة .." بالكلمة اللي قالت فاجرة تقطر الشمعة على خدها حلت عينها "شنوة هذا؟"

تلقي القلب يقطر اشنوة هذا ... في شنوة هذا حكى لها. تعز عليه برشة. حكى لها قالت "انا بعد عزي ودلالي وولد عمي اليوم باش نسرق ونحيب العار لولد عمي . انا باش نولي نطلب .. موتي خير"

الصباح ولد عمها خرج للخدمة وهي مخها يخدم "انا باش نعدي هاذاي بكات و عيطت ها الدهر غدارعلاش قاسي معاي ... أش عملت تحتك (ما حدش يعرف أش الدهر مخبي لنا) سلمت امرها لحكم ربي...؟ جبدت سكينه ماضية وجرت رقبتها والروح عزيزة جرّت .. جات جلدية، ساعتها ما حضرتهاش . بالفجعة وبالدم طاحت (بكري كانوا لا طبيب لا استعجالي لا حتى شيء) .. بالوقت جابوا (حاشا هالمحل) كفنوا .. غسلوا ... هزوها لبقيعتها آخر القدم. العباد روجت والمقابر تهزت وجاتها ضربة قال لها "قوم يا معاندة حكم الله قاسي ما كتبلك من الله"

وين باش تمشي .. وين باش تجي .. باش ترجع لدارها. ما تنجمش ترجع لدارها. جات في باب الجبانة وقعدت طالبة ... "يا كريم متع الله. يا كريم متع الله" .. يطيح الليل تلقي تربة من الجبانة تبات فيها. والي تصوره تعيش بيه. قديمة خبز ولا فلوس .. حتي شررات حويجات. نحات ها الكفن طالبة عدات عام صحيح. كمالة العام ولات سارقة اللي متعدي سطوش تخطفه له .. وراجل منقالة .. حاصل .. عام صحيح وهي تسرق (اللطيف). كمالة العام. قالت أش اخرتها وانا سرقة وقاعدة هكاية ... تعرفت على جيبات ربي ولات عاد ... في جوء آخر ... من الجوء هذاك ولات صانعة ... تشهرت الله فلانة ... اللي يحل عرس ولا ملاك بنته يجيب فلانة (كما نقولوا شافية كانت.. اي شافية ونعمة وعليه صناع بكري ولا توة ولات صوفية صادق ... صوفية صنادق هي حقة !!)

الراجل نرجعوا له. دفن مرته وروح (اللطيف حاشا هالمحل) حزين رزين مسكين العين قلة و الجحر حلاب. جاووه الجيران اصبر هذا قضاء و قدر، كل نفس ذائقة الموت .. اصبر الصبر من الايمان (الصبر فضيلة) قال "بعد بنت عمي وفات النساء"

تعدى العام الاول .. تعدى العام الثاني .. العام الثالث .. الجيران وعائلته يا ولدي أش اخرجتها هذي حاجة ربي قضاء و قدر. أش باش تعمل ربي كتب لها هكاكة. اصبر الصبر فضيلة ... باقي مشوي اللي قال هاك الكلام وهي عملت هكاكة. قعدت حفرة في قلبه. الله غالب. حاجة ربي حضرت ساعتها الله غالب هذاكة ربي كاتب اليها. خوذ بنية حلال وعمر دويرتك علاش وحدك .. كلمة الصباح وكلمة العشية ترد المسلمة يهودية خذا. خذا بنت حلال . ليلة عرسه. قالوا أش كون للعرس قالوا جيبوا الصانعة الفلانية (مشهورة) بدلت اسمها هي. موش اسها الحقاني. جابوها. كيف دخلت عاد للة الصانعة ... دارها ... هذي داري ... هذي بيتي ترى في العروس راجلي وقفت تغني والعروسة مصدرة ... في الاخر عاد عقاب السهرية. قالت عروبي الدار داري ... شلق راجلها. نقز رمى عليها برانسو وزوزها للبيت وجاب الشهود طلق الاخرى وبعثها لدارهم

وقعد هو وياها في الهناء والثبات حتي ماتت ومات .

العشرة (K2)

هو احنا جبدينا حديث على العشرة كفاش العبد يعاشر ويعاهد ...
تقعد العشرة على طول العمر انا انا قلت بنتي ...

توحدوا الله و عليه ذنب يستغفر الله

بنت ملك .. فرد كعبة ... وبوها يقدم يصلي حاضر هو يطلق
السلام متع الصلاة ويخرج له رأس بهيم يعطيه كار السلطنة
،يقول له "جيتك خاطب راغب في بنت الحسب والنسب " . (هك
يجيوا يخطبوا الطفلة) يقول له " لا"
يقول له " راوا ما تعطيهاش (كاتب لها) بش تولي عام طيرة ...
وعام صخرة ... وعام غولة" . ويقول له بوها "اللي كاتب كاتب"

نهار من النهارات البنية قامت الصباح بكري حشاك داخله
للميحاض . تسمع في بوها . صوت يكلم فيه اشكون يكلم في
بابا جات من تالي (البنات كانوا يحشمووا ويحياوا و يقدروا
الكبار موش كما بنات توة القباحة و الفصاصة) ترى في راس
بهيم وقف قدام بوها وخطبه .

سمعت الكلام . اللي قال عام طيرة... وعام صخرة.. وعام غولة
"انا" قالت "بنت سلطان. من بعد دلالي باش نعدي هاذوما.
البلاد اللي باش نعدي فيها المحنة هاذي ما عادش نقعد فيها "
تحمصت .(بكري البنات صواتهن نا تتسمعش خلي عاد شكواتهم و
تنفنيغهم) . ما ما جبدتش لوش و لا كلمة طلعت للصرايا وقعدت
تخمم كفاش "يحب لي حدمعايا ... نحب عبد صديق .." وهي
لا عندها لا اخت ولا عندها حتي حد .. كفاش باش تعمل.

عندهم نجار رويجل كبير. صديق هكة كيف عم عمر عنده ثلاثة
بنيات .(وقتنا كانت عشرة ماء و ملح كيف عشرة الاخوة .
جيراننا يجيونا وياقفوننا في المرض و الفرخ و الموت .قسمننا
الماء و الملح . توة لا هاذي ولا هاذي. ماعاد حد يهمه. كل واحد
لاهي في نفيسته). بنات جيرانهم قالت " توا نجربهم هاذيك
نحكي لها بسري ... "عم فلان "
قال لها "نعم"

قالت له " نحب بنتك الكبيرة غدوة ثقيل بحذايا"
قال لها "الله يبارك الغالي طلب على الرخيص"

الصباح صبح و اللي يصلي على النبي يربح روح لبنته، قال لها
"حضر روحك غدوة باش تمشي عند بنت السلطان". غسلت
طريقاتها. لبست حويجاتها لبست احسن ما عندها. (بكري ما
ثمّاش دخلة وخرجة كيف توا). هزها بوها . دخلت. صبحت
صباح الخير نهارك سعيد. تلقاها حاطة القرقاف وقاعدة تطرز.
قالت لها "اوك بقعتك. اقعد غادي"

قعدت (كانوا على القاعة والجراري وتوا الابنك والفتايات)
والقرقاف صغير حطته لها ... قعدت لا كلمة ولا سلمة . هاذيك
ساكتة وهاذيك ساكتة ... جاء الاول. جات دادا قالت ايا للة
تفطروا والاخرى قاعدة . لا قالوا لها ايا نفطروا لا حتي شيء .
مشات بنت السلطان فطرت وجات. رجعت لقرقافها. مدت لها
كويس تاي في الطبق. الاخرى مسكينة صائمة . فمها لا كلمة ولا
سلمة. جات العشية. جابوا لها كسكروت العشية قهوة وحاجة
حلوّة اللي كتب ربي والاخرى مسيكنة قاعدة. المغرب أذن وهي
جبدت سفساريها. جاء بوها قال لها " باش تبات ولى تروح...
قالت " لا نروح".

قالت لها " دادا تبعها واسمعهها في السقيفة أش تقول".

دوب ما وصلت لباب الدار. أوه ما حاشيتش بدار السلطان لا
ماكلة لاشراب قعدت صائمة. دخلت تتشفع. جات دادها. قالت
لها "للة. ما هيش صاحبة سر"

قالت له "غدوة جيب لي بنتك الوسطانية". اللي عملت الاولى
عملت للثانية روجت من الباب تتشفع. "في بالشر" .. اعطيني
شكشوكة دارنا"

جات دادها حكات لها اللي صار.

قالت له "غدوة جيب لي بنتك الصغيرة"

(هاذي مزورة) . من غدوة الصغيرة بدلت زيننت ... دخلت .
صباح الخير للة نهارك سعيد للة أش تطرز في ملخة و الالحاف .
ايا قالت لها " لا وختي أش بيني نقعد وحدي نقعد قرقاف
بالقرقاف انا وياك نعملوا قلب مع بعضنا" (أي).
قالت لها "ايجا مرحبا"

"ايا نتحدثوا آش بيك ساكتة ... واه ... اا جيت بحذاك باش
نقصروا الوقت ولا ساكتين".

تجبد فيها بالكلام جاء الاول. قالت لها "دادا قوم نفطروا"
قالت لها "وانا دادا ما تقليش. انا ضيفة ، بحذاكم. عيط لي انا
قبل ... ايا لله قوم نمشيوا مع بعضنا نفطروا"
قاموا جماع مشات فطرت (هذي ضربت الضربة) ضربتها قدقد.
طلعت. التاي جايبة كاس واحد.

الت لها "دادا وانا آش بيني ما نيش محسوبة في كويس تاي؟"
جابت لها كاس تاي. شربت. بدات بنت السلطان ترى فيها
شرهة وكلام ومنطق وجواب الكل. دخلت في الجو. قرب المغرب
قالت لها "نعيط لبابا باش يروح بي".
قالت لها " بات "

بعثت لبوها. قالت له "بابا راني بايطة".
في الليل طلعلوا للفريش مع بعضهم.
قالت لها "انت طلعت صديقة وعرفتك اللي انت باش تطلع
صديقتي الساعة "

تعاهدوا اللي هما اخوة وجرحوا صوابع بعضهم (جرحوا صوابع
بعضهم) وكل وحدة لحست الدم من صبع الاخرى. (الي هما اخوة
لا تقول لاختي شيء) وحكات لها حكايتها "هكة وهكة ما عاdash
نحب نقعد في البلاد هاذي نحب نعيط لعم فلان لانجار يطلع لها
براقة اللي ما يدخلش فيها الماء (وتسكر من داخل) ونحب
مفتاحها من داخل . ونحب فرش ونحطوا مونتنا وكل شيء
ويرمينا في البحر. تمشي معايا؟"
قالت لها "سلم امرك لربي و اصبر عللي عطاك و انا معاك .
انت تجوع نجوع انا. انت تكسي نتكسي انا. اللي جاب ربي
جماع. اخوة. اكثر من اختك احسبني"

عيطت لهاك النجار مدت له كيس محبوب . قالت له على
الفصالة اللي تحب عليها اما القفل تحب عليه من داخل .
البريركة في عوض شهير في جميعة حضرت . قالت له "حطها
في الدريبة" حطها . قعدت هي و اختها. كل ليلة يتعشاوا و كل
واحد يحصل فريشه . دار السلطان تنام و هما يبدوا
يهبطوا حواء .. بسيسة...سكر... كسكسي...زيت...عمروا هاك
البريركة النساسار (necessary) الكل تملات هاك البريركة و

تعمرت. قالت لها "الليلة نقصدوا ربي"
عيطت للنجار اعطاته كيس من المحبوب . و قالت له "الليلة نصف
الليل قد تلقى البريركة وفي السقيفة تهزها انت و الخدامة ،
ترميها في البحر(و هما في وسطها...يمشيوا كما نقولوا فلوكة..)

بعد ما تعشات هي وبوها "تسبح على خير" كيف العادة...دخلت
هي و وخيتها للبيت...هما رقدوا و هما دخلوا لهاك البريركة
..سكروا بالمفيتح ، قعدوا ..نصف الليل سمعوا البرويطة جات ،
البريركة تهزت . قالت لها "ربي معانا". قر..قر..قر..حتى
للشط، تلمت فيها الرجال شيعوها في البحر و روحوا على
رواحهم. (المقادف تخدم).

برا..برا..برا..قعدت عاك البريركة موجة تهز و موجة تحط ، هي
في هاك البحر. لا يعرفوا الليل ، لا النهار..لا الاول ولا
العشاء..يجوعوا ياكلوا، يرقدوا (محمد يحضر لهم). حتى جات
رمية من الرميات شروة كبيرة ترمات على شط البحر ولات
خضراء قبة خضراء مرارة بالجزار متع البحر..اما الماء ما
يدخاهاش.

قالت لها "الغربة عديناها اما الشر ما يتعداش)((الشر ما
يتعداش))..كفاش نعملوا ؟"
قالت لها "توا لليلة نشققوا الباب شوية وقت المغرب توا نخرج
انا و نشوف"-توا هذي بنت النجار - "ما تخافش علي نخرج -"
(نطيطة الفاطمة الناطقة)-"نلقاش حاجة ناكلوها .نلقاش
دويرة؟نلقاش حاجة ؟ندبر".

تعدوا يحلوا و يسكروا في الباب حتى المغرب . بنت النجار
تنكرت لبست لبسة و حلت البيب و خرجت. ماشية منا ..منا
حتى عرضها باب صراية كبيرة ، دار كبيرة . قالت "هذي دار
كبيرة ندخل لها " . دخلت تلقى طاولة (كان يعطي لنا ربي و رزق
الحلال الطيب و انت ماكش مشتاقة) (الشراءح و المراءح و
الصحافي البلار) . عبات - حشاك-لحم و حوت اللي قدرت عليه
و اللي كتب و شدت الثنية . "اختي" قالت لها "هذا قسيمنا جاء"
حطت تعشاوا هي و وخيتها سكروا بريركتهم و رقدوا على
نفسهم

نرجعوا لدار السلطان (الدار اللي مشاوا لها) . اللي مشات لها
الطفلة . السلطان حاكم على أمه كل ليلة الطاولة تنصب له
وحده . يحب معاه حتى حد . يحطوا الطاولة الخدام و بعد تهبط
الام و تعمل نظرة باش ولدها ما يتغشش . نصبوا الطاولة الخدام
و شافتها الام و طلعت على روحها . جاء الطفل باش يتعشي يلقي
الطاولة مبلبزة شيء مخطوف "أمي شوف الطاولة هكة!" .
"يا وليدي راني يزي عاد انت سهرت الليلة ما تعشيتش في
وقتك ، ما عايش تفيق بروحك أش تعمل ... يزي صلي على النبي
..إسم الله عليك.." (يتهلوس) .

من غدوة تنصبت الطويولة كيف العادة و هي في هاك الوقت
المعلوم هزت روحها مشات ..مشات تلقى هاك الطويولة خطفت
...منا...منا..منا..و رجعت . تعشاوا هي و اختها ، رقدوا . من
غدوة بنت السلطان قالت "الليلة نمشي أنا" . "يا وخيتي صعيب
عليك " . قالت لها "نعرف الثنية " . (منين تهرب هاذك اللي كتب
لها)

نرجعوا لولد السلطان قال لامه "ايا إيجا شوف الطاولة " قال
"بالحرام الليلة الما نعس" شدت الاخرى قالت "اليوم نمشي أنا
الليلة ..(شوف المكتوب كفاش يجي)..(ما لا) . سلمت الاخرى .
قالت لها كما نقولوا "خوذ الدورة على اليمين" ...نعتتها.

كيف اذن المغرب خرحت بنت السلطان تتدرج وصلت للبقيعة
..دخلت . "اختي قالت من هوني..دخلت للبيت...هي عملت يدها
هكة على الطويولة و هو رمى عليها برنوسة.
قال "صار انت تجي كل ليلة تعمل لي هكة في عشاي؟ امي احرك
في العرس"(هذي زوجتي لا خاطبة لا حنانة)
قالت له "على شرط "
قال لها "شنوة الشرط؟"

قالت له "نحب تبني لي صراية فوق الدار و نحب فيها مقصورة
(نقولوا احنا بيت بانو) ، نحب هاذي ما يدخلها حد المفتاح عندي
، نحب عندي براكاة على الشط تحطوها لي في الجنينة (متع اللي
جابت لها الخير الكل).

قال لها "الله يبارك الغالي طلب عل الرخيص" .
جابوا البريركة حطوها في الجنينة ، البناية صبحت تبني . جات

جميعة من الزمان

كل شيء حضر. حركوا في العرس. ليلة من الليالي طلعت اختها
للمقصورة باش تسربي لها الماكلة . كيف يعطيوها كعبة تمر
(تقسم هي وياها) تعطيها لاختها . باش تاكل وحدها يستحيل
....عرست سبعة ايام و سبعة ليالي لا من ينفخ و لا من يطبخ
كان في دار السلطان . عرست بنت السلطان . (الراجل كما الغطي
للطنجرة)

تعدوا الاخرى في المقيصرة الداخل . و الاخرى البرا عروسة !
راجاها يخرج و الاخرى تخرج اختاها حذاها يضحكوا
..يلعبوا...يفدلكوا... يشربوا التاي ..القهوة ..يتحدثوا ..هي
تقرب وقت راجلها و هي تدخل للمقيصرة و تسكر عليها (ما
فطنش بيها) و هي في ابيتها قاعدة علي روحها.

نهار من النهارات في العشية شتاء و برد و سحب هي و اختها
يتحدثوا و يتكلموا تجلوت ...قالت لها "اسم الله عليك ! اسم
الله علي اختي اللطف"
"يا اختي نحس في البرد..."
تجلوت ثلاثة تجلويلات ، صرفقت و طارت جات طيرة علي
الشباك.

قالت لها "يا وخيتي يا عزيزتي ايا ستار يا جبار. اذا صدقت لي
يا عيشة يا بنت النجار"
قالت لها "اللي عاهد ما يخونش"
سرفقت و مشات علي روحها . بكات (حاشا ها المحل) غردت "آش
باش تعمل؟" آش باش تقول؟ آش باش تسمي؟ دخلت فيها غولة
. هي هكة و خادمها طلعت .
قالت لها "دادا ما تطلعش ..بكات باش تبدل صوتها
"آش يك؟"

قالت لها "توا جانني جواب (كانوا الطيور يجيبوا الجوابات)
(البعيدة بابا مات و عندنا في سبرنا حزن ثلاثة سنين مايشوفني
حد . نحبك تجيب لي فطوري و عشاي
حط الطبق ، وصفق لي حتى كماله الثلاثة سنسن ، ماكلنش
(اللطف) يموت لنا واحد آخر و قل سيدك ما يطلع ليش"

تعدت هاك البنية غاديك ، سبيحة في يدها و هي ، حاطة

(حشاك) حويرة حمص... كل نهار يتعدى تحسبه. الطيرة كل صباح تجيها ،
تقول لها "عيشة وخيتي يا ستار يا جبار
إذا صدقت لي يا عيشة يا بنت النجار"

تقول لها "اللي عاهد ما يخونش"

نهار من النهارات من هاك العام قال "والله اللما نطلع نطل عليها... و حدها قاعدة.. ما تتوحش؟" ، الطيرة ركزت هي ركزت و هوجبد النبلة و ضربها في فخذاها بركت . هو خاف هرب . نقزت الاخرى "اسم الله على اختي .. اسم الله عليك عمات لها (ماوا كانوا يداويو بالسمن و العسل و الزيت) شوية سمن . ربطت لها حتى برات سويققتها صرفقت طارت . مازال للعام نهير و هاك الطيرة صرفقت و جات و ركزت على البنيك حذا اختها . قعدت... "اسم الله عليك .. اسم الله على اختي.. انشاء الله توليلي كيف العادة . تربحت بيها . كمالة العام قد قد تتنفض ثلاثة نفضات و تولي صخرة ولات (حاشا) و بنيتي صخرة .. حجرة باردة سكة "اسم الله على اختي" تحيب في الفرارش تلف .. الكوانن قدامها تدفي فيها تببت فيها في شونها في الليل .. شيد تعمل فيه اللطف و تعد بالنهار .. بالنهار .. مازالت للعام جميعة . قالن "يا ربي الطيرة عديتها و الصخرة عديتها و الغولة و ين باش نحطها... يا ربي .. يا ربي ؟" و تبكي مسكينة . عندهم الباب متاعهم (كانوا قبل يقولوا بابا سرور) "يا بابا سرور (كانوا قبل ما يتكلموش الوجه للوجه يحشموا حتى اليدين يبدوا مغطين) هذا كيس محبوب نعطيك ها القفة هاذي و تحطها كما نقولوا في الباب الجبلي ، قمر البقعة اللي باش تحطها فيها كيف نقلك جيبها لي " قال لها "الله يبارك"

لفت هاك الحجرة في فراشية عزيزة غالية . قرأت عليها .. باستها .. عنقتها و الدموع تسبب مسقية . عطاته الفلوس و عطاته القفيفة و مشى .
"يا وخيتي كنت تجي و تسلم علي .. عام كامل حجيرة بحذايا و توة تخليني وحدي" . و هي مسكينة داخالة فيها غولة . و تحسب

و تسبح ، تحسب و تسبح حتي كمل العام. بعث لها السلطان قال لها "شنوا هاوا العام وفي" قالت له "على الاقل نعديو ١٥ يوم باش نحنيو، نعمل شعري و نقي هو هكاكة ؟ ثلاثة سنين ، انا (حاشا هالحل) حزينه ما نعمل شيء يحب لي باش نقد روعي".
كمالة العام قد قد عيطت لهاك الراجل . عطاته صر فلوس و قالت له تمشي لهاك البقيعة اللي حطيت فيها القضية هاذيك في القفيفة . اللي تلقى غادي جيبه هاو فراشية لفها غادي و جيبها . مشى هاك الراجل يلقي عزوزة السنة هكة كبرها ! الشعر هابط (باسم الله الرحمان الرحيم) قدس قد هكة . رمى عليها الفراشية حطها في القفيفة و جابها . دخات "يا ناري على وخيتي. كنت زينة ..كنت شابة..مسيكنة بكات . زوزوها لبيت البانو . عملت لها بانو عزيز و غالي . قصت لها شعرها . قالت لهم "قلوا لسيدك ياقف لي بالبرودو و الحم المشوي كنت ما ناكلش بالقدا و كنت قلبي معمول ، يبعث لي شوية متقويات ، شوية غلة"

الصباح صبح والي صلى على النبي يربح ذبحوا الدجاج و اللحم و هي تسقي في هاك العزوزة . ما عملت الجمعة و لات لزينها و صغرها بكلها كيف عادت (وردة).
حابوا عاد الحنة و الحرقوس -بداوا الحنة و النقاء و اللي تعمل هاذيك تعمل هاذيك ..كيف كيف "فاش قام؟" تقول لها "انت عانيت ثلاثة سنين " ..كيف..كيف...حتى ليلة سي ولد السلطان داخل لبيته . لبست كسوة عزيزة غالية ، الاخرى لبست كسوة و قعدت في بيت البانو و الاخرى خرجت . دخل راجلها "هاذا النهار المبروك ! هذا النهار السعيد (صائم!!!)" "يالله ثلاثة سنين!"
قالت له "في سبرنا عندنا هكاكة . هاهم تعداوا بالصبر و ربي دائم ."

تعشاوا و شربوا كويس تاي و دخلوا للمقصورة . جات باش ترقد (كانوا قبل بكري سوارى نوم قصار) . هي هزت ساقها . هكة و الضربة (ظهرت) في ساقها. قال لها "منين هاذي؟"

قال له "طلعت لي دماله"

قال لها " لا هاذي ماهيش دماله"

"دماله" ، "ماهيش دماله"

قال لها "قل لي سبتها نعطيك سبحة الامان "

قالت له "خذيتني لا تعرفني بنت شكون؟ لا منين جيت و كيف
عطيتني سبحة الامان
هاي قصتي...راني بنت ملك..."
و حكات له بالحكاية من اولها الى آخرها ، من الجملة قالت له
"هاي اختي علاش قلت لك اعمل لي بيت باش اختي نعطيها
فطورها و عشاها. خرجت اختها مبدلة مزينة .
قال لها "لا مانع لما قدر الله بالصبر كل شي ءيوفى، الصبر
جميل. (الصبر مفتاح الفرج يابنتي، الصبر فضيلة) . شنوة
هاذي باش تبات هكة الليلة ؟ بالحرام ما تبات كان عروسة "
(امالا!)

و هبط . "بابا" قال "الشهود باش يكتب لها صدلقها على بنت
الورزير(يا بابا!).

و عاشوا في الثبات و النبات حتى ماتت و مات .

توحدوا الله واللي عليه ذنب يستغفر الله

كانك ما كان

ثم واحد شيخ قبيلة عنده مرته ما تولدش . هاك الرجل باش يموت على الصغار . ربي سبحانه كتب لمرته و حبلى . وقفوا جماعة القبيلة و هي تولد . تطلق طلقة تجيب طفلة قد الفلقة . (كانوا قبل عند العرب الطفلة تاخذ بنت عمها) . جاوا لولد سلفها و قالوا له "بر اربط صبعك ببنت عمك خلليها تقعد لك" . هو اكبر منها عنده عشرين سنا . قال "شنو ناخذ طفلة قد صبعي؟" . هو الطفل الله غالب عليه ... قال نغافل مرت عمي راهي لاهية في الولادة و ندخل نسرق . هو مازال كيف دخل و زوز رجال دخلوا . تخبأ و قعد في التركينة . الزوز رجال تربعوا و حطوا الطفلة بين ساقهم .

و قالوا "أش نسميوها؟"

قال "وافيت السيط"

قال "قدلش باش تعيش؟"

قال "كذا و كذا"

قال "أش كون باش تاخذ"

قال "الراجل هذا في الحلال و راجل آخر في الحرام"

بهت الطفل! كتبوا لها ما لازمها فوق جبينها و خرجوا . هما خرجوا و هو خدا الطفلة و قصها في ثنين و رجعها و خرج . من غدوة يستنى باش يقولوا الطفلة ماتت لا ماتت لا شيء . قال "يحيني دهري و ناخذ طفلة تعمل علي صاحب . ، شابة قطعة . مشى هو عرس . كبرت هاك الطفلة عزيزة مدلة . هز روحه و سافر من البلاد . خل ولاده ومرته قدام بوه و مشى لتونس يدبر في خدمة (هو باش يهرب و يبدل وجه من هاك البلاد خاف بوه يعرس له ببنت عمه) .

الطفلة بداوا يخطبوا فيها و بوها يقول "عندها ولد عمها و نعطيها للبراني" (البرانية ما يعطيوش مالهم لغيرهم) . بو الطفل قال على يمين الله ما ياخذها كان ولدي . يبعث لولده قال "روح باش تعرس ببنت عمك" . قال "انا ناخذ مرا تعمل علي صاحب !" . قالوا له "بوك عطا كلمته" . (كانوا قبل الشايب اذا تكلم وفى كل شيء)

سلم في التجارة متاعه و رجع للبلاد . عرس عليها و نصب عليها

العسة (ديما الخيال بين عينيه باش تعمل عليه صاحب) . العزب ندادها موش مخليينها في راحة ...في قد بوك ، انت خير منه ...تقول لهم "مانيش قاعدة عليه! عندي صاحبي كيما نقولوا جمال عبد الناصر . هي في تونس و هو في مصر. قالوا "كفاش صاحبك في مصر؟" قالت "هو يكيده ! يجيني مرتين في الشهر على ظهر الخيل " . واحد منهم ما صدقش .

قال "اعطيوني نركب و نستفسر لكم".
ركب على حصانه و مشى . وصل نهار عيد . الناس داخلة تعيد . هو ولد ملك . دخل يعيد مع جملة الناس . ضيفه و كمالة الثلاثة ايام قال له "عندي سؤال " . قال له "تفضل"
قال له " في قريتنا طفلة شابة قطعة قالت لببي انت صاحبها ، جيت حببت نعرف".

ولد السلطان دهش اما حمر عينيه و قال له "رد بالك واحد يمسيها" .
قال له "مبروكة عليك"
ولد الملك الهدرة قعدت في مخه.....قال "وحدة بدوية ضاق عليها الناس اكل ما لقاتني كان انا؟ خوي في هاك الدشرة توة نمشي نزوره و نشوف الحكاية".

يمشي يمشي وصل للبادية . يلقي سارح سألته .قال له "تعرفش دار فلانة ؟" قال له "نا السارح متاعهم " . عطاء فلوس و رمى عليه الصحبة و قال باش يوصله للدار .

ليلة من الليالي مرت الراجل ولدت بات بحذاها . هو ما يخلليهاش وحدها . هاك السارح دخله ليلتها . رجعت للاة العين بعد الولادة لدارها ناس بدو ما عندهمض ضوء. مسبول فوق الفرش . تفجعت "شكون؟"
قال لها "انا فلان بعثت لي هاني جيتك" . باتوا بالخير (شيء مكتوب وين تهرب؟) .

راجلها ما طمانش رجع يتفقد ، يلقاها راقدة مع الراجل . مشى جاب سلسلة و ربط لهم ساقهم باش الصباح يقيم ناسه و يعمل فضيحة . فاقته هي تلقى ساقها و ساقه مربوطة .،قالت له "قوم معاي" . يمشيوا خطوة خطوة .عندها ربيبها عاملة فيه الخيرمشات له و قالت له "حل الراجل او كان يموت البلد ترحل معاه . ايا حله و ربطت هي ساقها في ساق ربيبها و تسرسبت رقدت هي وياه . الاخر مشى لبوه و بوها و جابهم (باش يعمل فضيحة) . هما هزوا الغطى و يلقاوا الربيب مربوط ! الطفل قال لهم " الدنيا بردت جيت بحذا داداي (هما هكا

يقولوا) و تغطيت . الناس الكل رجعت عليه "ما تحشمش " ، يسبوا و يقشعرا فيه .

هو الحكاية ما جدتش عليه . النظر اللي شافه ما يغلطش . برد مديدة و مشى لخواه قال له "نحبك تخترلي جارية باش نهديها لولد السلطان" . عطاه جارية عزيزة غالية . عمل لها سبعة وصفان و شد الثنية لبلاد السلطان . ايا وصل ، دخل غزر عرف الراجل "هذا هو سيد الشباب !" . بعد الضيافة ، قال له "ايا نمشيوا نصطادوا" .

وصاوا للغابة . كل واحد شد سلاحه . هاذاك فايق و هاذاك فايق . قال له "موش انت هك النهار بحذا المرا؟" قال له "انا هو" . قال له "امالا هك صار و هك صار و راني هربت لتونس و كتب لي و خذيتها و صار اللي صار و مازالت باش تعيش معاي و نحيبوا زوز صغار (هك قالوا الملاءكة) . قال له "كيف انت عارفها قدرة علاش حققت كل هذا التحقيق و عاندت حكم الله؟"

هز الراجل روحه و روح لبلاد و رجع لمرته و جاب منها زوز اولاد و عاشت معاه بقية عمرها . والمكتوب على الجبين لازم تشوفه العين يا بنتي.

توحدوا الله و اللي عليه ذنب يستغفر الله

مرة يحكي هووطيره قالت له الحذر يغلب القدر
سيدنا سليمان كان يحكي مع الطيور وهي طيرة عظيمة ياسر كبيرة .
قعدوا يتحدثوا على القدرة والحذر .
قالت له " الحذر يغلب القدر كيف يبدأ واحد مستحذر على حاجة ما
تتكسرش " .

قال لها هو " لا الحذر يغلب القدر "

قالت هي " لا الحذر يغلب القدر "

قال لها " امالا هاوا حاجة صغيرة تنجم تقدها مرت فلان الفلاني اليوم
تولد بنية هاذيك البنية باش تاخذ ولد الملك الفلاني . تاخذه وما يظن
بها حد ، تاخذه وتجييب وليد تنجم تحافظ عليها " .
قالت " نجم نحافظ وما يمسه حد وما يطولها حد " .
قال لها " امها تولد اليوم " .

قالت له " توا نسرقها " .

الام ولدت وحطوا البنية وراها ورقدت . جات الطيرة من تالي طبست
علي هاك البنية لمتها وطارت بها . وحطتها في عميق البحار . في
جزيرة منين تدور كان الماء ورابي سبحانه كاتب لها باش تعيش ، تزقق
فيها الطيرة من فمها . عاشت وكبرت ما تعرف حتي حد في الدنيا
كان هاك الطيرة هاذيكة تسرح وين تحب وترجع لها . تجيبها الماكلة .
كبرت البنية وصل عمرها خمستاشن عام . جاء الوقت اللي باش تحبل
فيه الطفلة .

جات مرضة لولد الملك ماعرفولهاش دواء . كان ديما يبكي وفادد ويقول
حاجة غامة علي . بوه ما خلاش طبيب ولا كاتب ما جابوش . كاتب من
الكتاب قالو خرج ولدك للبحر يبدل الجو والهواء .

عملوا بوه بابور فيه كل ما يلزم ومهما حاجة تفرح وتزهى وعمل له
جمعية وبعثه يدوروا في هاك البابور شايعين ، وولد السلطان شيء
الهم ديما علي قلبه . جات ريحية شروى كبيرة تدز في هاك البابور
حتي رصى في هاك الجزيرة بالكتبة .

قال لهم " نحب نهبط ندور "

قالوا له " نهبطوا معاك "

قال لهم " لا "

وما يعصيو امره . خذا سلاحه في يده وطلع . هو يدور وكلمته الطفلة
من تحت .

قالت له "آش كونك انت اللي جيت للبلاصة هذه؟".

قال لها "وينك انت"

قالت "له هاني في الكاف ، انا اول مرة نرى بشر ما نحسابش فم عباد
غيرانا وامي الطيرة" .

قال لها "هاك تتكلم"

قالت له "ما نعرفش انا خلقت لقيت امي طيرة تمشي تطير وين تحب
وترجعلي" .

قال لها "هاك بشر كيفنا".

قعد معاها .

هي تشوف امها جات وهي تخبيه .وربي يهبط على هاك الطيرة حجاب
الغفلة ما ترى شيء . هاك الطفل هذاك قال من بحذاها ما عادش
نخرج شد هي هاك الطفلة وكبش

سيدنا سليمان ما هو يوحى عرف الطفلة حبلى وعرف الطفلة باش
تولد . سهلها .

قال لها "يا عنقاء بنتك كبرت ولا ما زالت"

قالت له "حقه فكرتني موش قلت لي في الوقت الفلاني بنتك تحبل ، لا
حبلى ولا جابت ولد . فين القدر اللي تحكي عليه؟"

قال لها "نحب انشوف بنتك"

قالت له "كفاش سيدنا سليمان الدنيا ريح"

قال لها "لفها وجبيها"

قالت "باهي"

طارت الطيرة لبنتها وقالت لها "راوا سيدنا سليمان يحب يشوفك"
هي ربي سبحانه وتعالى هاك الكرش ما شافتهاش بالكل هبط عليها
الستر الطيرة هاذي ياسر كبيرة وقوية حطتها ما بين سنيها وطارت بها
جابتها قدام سيدنا سليمان .

قال لها "انت اقعد غادي . قال للطفلة فلانة بنت فلانة" قالت "نعم" .

قال فلان بن فلان اخرج . خرجوا الزوز يتدحرجوا .الطفل يتكسل
والطفلة كرشها على حلقها . وقتها فين شافتها .تلقت سيدنا سليمان
للطيرة وقال لها "وين الحذر متاعك؟"

عيطت عيطه وقالت يا لطيف وطار .يقولوا ما هبطتش حتى لهاذي
الساعة .

القدرة غلبت الحذر. قد ما استحضفت عليها ما صح لها حتى
شيء الكاتب كاتب.